TITLE: ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S CENTRES

AUTHOR: M. HELEN BROWN BA (ECON) HONS

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SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the nature of organising activity in women's centres. Such organising activity occurs within the cultural context of the women's movement. Specifically here the importance of non-hierarchical organisation is identified. Examination of the related literature shows that the processes by which non-hierarchical organisation is constructed have received little attention; in this research descriptions of non-hierarchical organisation as 'spontaneous' or 'natural' are challenged.

The research design is in accordance with recent developments in organisational analysis which argue for the importance of identifying connectable vertical (synchronic) and horizontal (processual) components. The vertical components in this study are the values of the women's movement which are shown to inform both a preferred mode of conduct and a desired end state of existence. The horizontal components are provided by two long term participant observation studies of women's centres. Additional supportive data is provided by three short case studies. The research methodology challenges some existing notions of the nature of interviewing and of participant observation, and it is argued that, where a strong value for equality exists in the research locations, the research procedures must reflect this value.

The negotiative processes which are involved in constructing non-hierarchical organisation are detailed and discussed. Specifically these processes make demands on the organising skills of participants, and are undertaken in contexts where the endeavour rarely receives full legitimation. It is also shown that the arenas in which these negotiative processes occur are variable with respect to the particular structural configurations which pertain at a given time. Particular difficulties are shown to arise in the case of women's centres where the need to manage a situation of 'open participation' makes further demands on participants.

It is concluded that it is inadequate to characterise the processes examined as 'spontaneous'; they are inherently 'political' and hence negotiated.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

I. LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH

Women's Centres are organisations set up by women to provide services, activities and social space specifically for women. They are used in a variety of ways such as the advising and supporting of homeless and battered women, as information exchanges and contact points for their localities, and as physical spaces available for group work or more informally - dropping in for coffee. These activities take place in contexts which are collectively organised, non-profit making and largely dependent on voluntary workers.

Present estimates suggest that there are about forty women's Centres in Britain. They are a part of the women's movement, which Coote and Campbell (1982:35) characterise as 'a loose federation of small groups, linked chiefly by a sense of involvement and a common cause'. Our particular interest in the organisational aspects of Women's Centres leads us to focus on the fact that women's movement organisations demonstrate a commitment to non-hierarchical organisation, a feature which is paralleled in anarchist writings, as Schulman indicates.

> Anarchism, by definition, and feminism as it has evolved, share many premises, for both are fundamentally anti-hierarchical . . . Both operate through loose voluntary social organisation from the bottom up, relying on collective activity by small groups.
>
> (Schulman, 1983:227)

II. INTENTIONS

The primary intention of this thesis is to explicate the processes of constructing non-hierarchical organisation through case study research. The aims of the research are:

1. To develop a greater understanding of the operation of small-scale

non-hierarchical organisations.

2. The development of a theoretical analysis of the processes and structures occuring within organisations characterised by a commitment to egalitarian values.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The survey of the organisational literature and the examination of anarchist writing will show that very little interest has so far been taken in the processes by which non-hierarchical organisation is produced. Typically, characterisations such as 'natural' or 'spontaneous' have removed any sense of problematic from the processes involved. For organisation theory the implication of this is that forms of task allocation and of collaboration and means of control and integration other than super- and subordination are underestimated (Westerlund and Sjöstrand, 1979). In consequence, it has not been possible to locate the present research squarely in a body of existing work; in this sense the study is exploratory.

IV. HYPOTHESES

The main hypothesis to be examined is: how far is non-hierarchical organisation a natural or spontaneously occuring form of social organisation? The thesis, derived from empirical data on the organisation of Women's Centres suggests that non-hierarchical organisation is far from spontaneous; that if the overlay of traditional forms of hierarchical organisation and super- and subordination be stripped away, no naturally occuring form of human cooperative organisation lies revealed underneath. Rather, social orders based on collectivist-democratic and non-hierarchical forms of cooperation have to be constantly struggled over and negotiated for,

in order to create new forms of organisation which embody and enhance the value of collectivism. In the case of Women's Centres the terms on which negotiations occur make reference to the values of the women's movement, and these constitute the cultural context in which the empirical locations operate. We shall further argue:

1. The explication of structural processes in organisations demands a contextualised and processual analysis.
2. The production of social organisation requires the exercise of skill on the part of participants.
3. The arenas in which negotiation occurs vary with respect to the structural arrangements of the organisation which pertain at a given time.

V. OUTLINE OF THE APPROACH

This study recognises the need to locate organisational issues in their context and to examine organisational processes from a longitudinal perspective. The major part of the empirical data is in the form of two long term participant observation studies of Women's Centres. The context of these studies is provided by an over-view of the women's movement and its approach to organising activity, and the analysis is backed up by three short case studies which are an additional source of example and illustrative of the variation which can occur within the general remit of non-hierarchical organisation. The analytical approach makes use of the different insights which derive from these different empirical perspectives to build towards a complex and interactive picture of the processes involved.

It is central to our argument that, to avoid the implied determinism which characterises non-hierarchical organisation as 'natural', it is necessary to explore the relationship between social action and its symbolic referents. In this case we refer to the values

of the women's movement - sharing of tasks and skills, participation by all and rejection of hierarchical forms - as they are enacted in the production of social organisation. We shall show that the relationship between values and action may be unclear, ambiguous or disputed, and that the process by which strategies and tactics are legitimately linked to values is 'political' (Pettigrew, 1973) and hence negotiated. We are further able to show that the negotiative processes which are involved in constructing non-hierarchical organisation make demands on the skills of participants, and in this respect a particular problem facing Women's Centres is that the transitory nature of participation inhibits the accumulation of 'experiential resources' (Donati, 1983). The longitudinal research design reveals the flux of organisational energy and we are able to illustrate the way in which different arenas of negotiation occupy 'centre stage' at different times. We show that this variation is dependent on the skills and resources of participants and that different aspects of the structural configuration of the organisation are perceived as 'dominant stabilities' at various times and assume a 'taken for granted' character which removes them from the negotiating arena. Overall we observe that a difficulty facing Women's Centres is that of innovation - of locating in contexts where the endeavour is rarely fully legitimated and, for participants, of producing and reproducing non-hierarchical organisation without the benefit of a received body of knowledge and practice.

VI. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapter One comprises the review of the literature. We first establish the very limited amount of work which directly relates to the study area and the extent to which organisation theory is dominated by assumptions of hierarchy. The remainder of the review identifies

(i) such evidence as currently exists about the nature of non-hierarchical organisation, and (ii) current discussions about organisational research. We are able to show that, in general, non-hierarchical organisation is embedded within a hierarchical structure, and that this location reduces the extent to which demands are made on the organising skills of the participants in non-hierarchical groupings. However, we find (undeveloped) suggestions that if the skills of organising are distributed between participants there is an inevitable reduction in hierarchy. In this part of the review we are also able to identify a value component as providing motivation towards a particular form of organisation.

The second part of the review turns to the way in which organisation is understood and researched. We endorse approaches which argue against over-simplification, and in particular note the importance of attending to process, context and history in organisational analysis. The form of the research design is indicated by writers who have shown the need to incorporate a temporal dimension in 'structure' and to give due space to the creativity of participants.

In Chapter Two the research concepts and data base are described. The requirement for connectable vertical (synchronic) and horizontal (longitudinal) components in organisational analysis, identified in Chapter One, is detailed in terms of (i) the cultural context, (ii) the environmental context, and (iii) the group's social organisation, as vertical components (connected by reference to the core values which inform organising activity in the women's movement) with the long case studies providing horizontal components. We are not able in a study of this scale to provide full processual analyses of the cultural and environmental contexts; we do, however, utilise a different temporal perspective in the short case studies to illuminate different dimensions of structure. Research questions which are

raised here are: how is the pursuit of equality affected by variation in individual capabilities and how might these be minimised? How does a collectively structured organisation relate to a hierarchically structured environment? How are differences in commitment levels managed? How is the question of leadership dealt with? What are the effects of mixing paid and voluntary workers?

Some of these questions were, of course, prompted by the initial choice of study area. They were added to by the examination of the women's movement and organising activity within it which comprises the cultural context (Chapter 3). In this chapter we identify a number of communalities in the approach to organisation taken by feminist and anarchist writers, but note that the latter have not taken seriously the question of how social order within the anarchist community is produced. On the other hand there are many descriptive accounts, and some more analytical ones, of feminist organising activity. From these we are able to demonstrate the widespread agreement which exists with respect to the core values of the women's movement, and to identify both positive and problematic aspects of attempts to implement these values in non-hierarchical organisation.

The three short case studies are presented in Chapter Four. They are preceeded by a short preamble which outlines the general characteristics of Women's Centres and distinguishes them from the range of organisational settings examined in Chapter Three. The discussion which concludes this chapter summarises the case material and shows how differences in the stability of various factors in the organisational configuration are related to differences in the directedness of negotiative processes.

Chapter Five is a detailed discussion of the methodological and analytical approach to data collection in the long case studies. It is placed at this point in the thesis since it directly pertains to

these case studies. We review discussions of participant observation and interviewing procedures in the literature, and critically evaluate them in relation to this research, which we note makes special demands on a researcher who is a participant in groups which espouse open participation. We show here how participants contribute to the development of the analysis, and argue that the validity of case study research is to be understood (i) in terms of its usefulness for practitioners, and (ii) by the manner in which the phenomena in question are described in terms which enable them to be connected to existing theory. In this chapter we also outline the analytical strategy which is adopted towards the empirical data.

The long case studies appear in Chapters Six and Seven. Chapter Six contains within it an account of the modification of the style of participant observation which occurred in the course of the study. Chapter Seven is longer and more complex, both because a longer period of time is involved, and because the Women's Centre in question changed its nature to a markeddegree in the course of the study. At the end of each of these chapters the case material is summarised under three heads: first, under 'organisational movement' we note variations in structural configurations over time and make some reference to the content and context of organisational movement. Second, under 'values' this content is examined by looking for further evidence of the core values and at how they are enacted. Third, under 'relationships with the environment' we look at the context of organisational movement, and note that interactions with the extra-movement environment may be intermittent and that the skills of participants play a role in environmental relationships since in the research locations non-hierarchical organisation is not contained within a hierarchical structure (cf page 6).

These summaries follow the longitudinal format of the case

studies and identify processual variations. The discussion in Chapter Eight draws together the research data in a number of overlapping themes which make vertical as well as horizontal connections. In this discussion we emphasise the importance of negotiation in organisational processes and the role played by the concept of legitimacy. The core values (in these settings) refer both to a preferred mode of conduct and to a desired end state. We therefore approach the analysis bearing in mind that action is assessed both in terms of its present qualities and as its relation to a valued future is perceived. The tension between future ideals and present time contingencies is amply illustrated, as is the motivation to reconstruct the present in the direction of a more fully enacted form of non-hierarchical organisation. The problems the Women's Centres experience in this respect, together with their attempted solutions are discussed under 'participation', 'power and influence', and 'skills and differentials'. Under 'locating in the environment' we distinguish between the extra- and intramovement environment and relate changes in environmental location to perceptions of autonomy. We then locate the empirical data in its cultural context and show that there is a requirement for leadership acts to be 'distributed' (Brown and Hosking, 1986) in Women's Centres. Finally, the success of Women's Centres is discussed in terms of the dual assessment criteria of present qualities and future states indicated above.

Chapter Nine concludes the study with a summary of the research and an indication of future possibilites.

CHAPTER 1

The Literature

CHAPTER ONE: THE LITERATURE

I. INTRODUCTION

A problem facing the researcher who chooses to work in an area which has so far received little attention is that there is no clearly delineated body of literature in which to locate. It is therefore accepted that some readers will perceive gaps, while others will prefer development in areas which are here underdeveloped. Most obviously, perhaps, the literature on voluntary associations, self-help groups and social movements attends to aspects of social life which, in terms of their defining characteristics - lack of monetary incentives, skill and information sharing, and oppositional stance - clearly have some pertinence for the study of Women's Centres. On the other hand, the wide-ranging 'classificatory' nature of much work in these areas (see, for example, Zald and Ash, 1966, Killilea, 1976, Goldstone, 1980) derives from research interest in a comprehensive account of phenomena. This approach has not been adopted here, and consequently a full review of literature in these areas is not intended; they will be referenced to the extent that they contribute to an understanding of organisational aspects of the phenomena they explore.

The primary focus of this research is <u>organisational</u> aspects of Women's Centres, and thus it is to the literature on organisational behaviour that most attention will be paid. In particular, questions of leadership and power, boundary management and relations with the environment are to be considered here. However, these questions form the basis of many explorations in organisation theory. A major difference in this research is in the empirical location of these questions and there is a severe restriction on work of an analytical nature which is located in similar settings. Among the few exceptions are Rothschild-Whitt's (1982) work on collectivist-democratic

organisations, and Freeman's (1973, 1984) work on the women's movement in the USA. Other than this there is little specific analytical basis on which to build.

In other respects writing which derives from a feminist perspective, and, to a lesser extent, some anarchist writing, is useful in drawing attention to areas which are seen as problematic - a source of research questions if not an answer to them. In addition, the wealth of anecdotal evidence which describes experiences of organising in the women's movement broadens the empirical base of this research and identifies the historical and cultural context in which it locates. This evidence is presented in detail in Chapter 3. Here we must anticipate one point from this discussion since it informs the perspective taken towards organisation theory - namely that the strong preference for a particular mode of organisation, one which is collectivist and non-hierarchical in form, is informed and underpinned by an agreed set of 'core values'. Therefore, in our exploration of the organisation literature we will be seeking both acknowledgement of the importance of identifying the values, which inform the nature of organisation, and explication of the interrelation between values and ideology, and organising activity and structural processes. This emphasis will be recognised as one aspect of the general criticism (Pettigrew, 1985:3) levelled at much research in this area as 'essentially ahistorical, acontextual and aprocessual'. His advocacy of a contextualised and processual approach as counter to this tendency is endorsed, and discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

In this chapter we shall first establish (Section II) that organising activity is generally assumed to take place in hierarchically structured contexts. In view of this the remainder of the literature review is concerned to identify and assess (i) such evidence as presently exists about the nature of non-hierarchical organisation, and

(ii) current discussions about the nature of organisational research (in any setting). The final section of this chapter summarises the review and orientates the reader for Chapter 2 which details the conceptual framework and design of this research.

In Section III we look at the Human Relations school and socio-technical systems. In these areas of work there has been interest in informal and autonomous groups within organisations, but we note that there is little or no consideration of how social order within such groups is negotiated, since this is assumed to be the outcome of 'natural' or 'spontaneous' processes. We further note that it is frequently the case that autonomous or non-hierarchically organised groups are embedded within a hierarchical context. This has the effect of removing managerial tasks such as task definition and boundary management from their remit; our contention is that groups, such as Women's Centres, who are attempting to implement non-hierarchical organisation, must engage with managerial as well as executive tasks. This has implications for our later arguments concerning skills.

In this Section the idea (page 18) that there are organisational advantages in pursuing participation, rather than hierarchical control, is introduced. This idea is developed in Section IV where we look at the Human Resources approach. Specifically, we note here the moral or value component of this approach, and that some work in this area (e.g. Likert, 1976) contains strong suggestions that there is an inevitable de-emphasising of hierarchy within organisations if inter-personal and organisational skills are valued and developed. This part of the literature review concludes by identifying the importance of a value component in motivating attempts to create non-hierarchical forms of organisation.

In Section V the focus of attention moves to examine approaches

to the study of organisation. Under (1) we discuss Systems Theory and link this to the preceeding sections by noting that, at the organisational level, the 'spontaneous cooperation' of the Human Relations approach now becomes 'equilibrium' or 'dynamic homeostasis' and is subject to the same criticism of unexplicated processes, in this case within the organisation. Criticisms and alternative approaches (2) come primarily from interactionism and ethnomethodology, and are concerned to assert the role of participants in creating organisational settings and to indicate the true complexity of organisational realities. An analytical approach which engages with this complexity and avoids determinism is argued to involve some means of incorporating process, context and history in its formulation. In particular we examine ways of transcending the static connotations of 'structure' and of giving due space to the negotiated quality of organisational life. Importance is thus placed on the reflexive nature of organising activity, and we also note that different aspects of organisation are made visible analytically by adopting different temporal perspectives towards them. We are able to locate the role of values (identified above) in the construction of social organisation. These act as reference points for actions, and are linked to them via the negotiation of legitimacy. (The specific values which inform non-hierarchical organisation in the women's movement are referred to above (page 12).)

II. THE DOMINANCE OF HIERARCHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

It has become commonplace among radical theorists to criticise organisation theory for its managerial bias (see, for example, Burrell and Morgan, 1979). From the point of view of this research a more fundamental, extensive and unexamined bias is that which assumes that organising takes place exclusively in hierarchical contexts (see, for

example, Westerlund and Sjöstrand, 1979). Herbst (1976) considers this situation arises from a failure of imagination - it is very difficult to conceive of organisations which do not have a hierarchical structure and, consequently, where they do exist they often remain unrecognised. Gerlach and Hine (1970), in their study of social movements, do identify a non-hierarchical form of organisation, but similarly cite a lack of imagination, here as inhibiting the development of work in this field.

> One of the most significant and least understood aspects of a movement is its organisation, or 'infrastructure'. We have found that movement organisation can be characterised as a network - decentralised, segmentary and reticulate. Most people, even those participating in movements, are not able to imagine an organisation of this type. There is a marked tendency in our society to identify an organisation as something which has clear-cut leadership and which is centrally directed and administered in a pyramidical, hierarchical pattern . . . People may sense that a popular mass movement may not have all the bureaucratic administrative machinery that such formal organisations have, but they still feel that it must possess central direction . . . too many studies of movement dynamics have been hindered by the limitations of this model, which attributes the success of a movement to a single charismatic leader.
>
> (Gerlach and Hine, 1970:33,39)

Westerlund and Sjöstrand (1979:106) also identify hierarchy as 'one of the most deeply rooted notions of how organisations should be structured', and consider that a failure to challenge the universality of this notion can lead to some questionable consequences. Their indictment is a serious one; forms of task allocation and of collaboration and means of control and integration other than super- and subordination are underestimated within organisation theory.[1] For them, lack of recognition is due to a more wilful 'reluctance' than the, perhaps excusable, limited imagination proposed by Herbst and

1. The delegation of authority within matrix structures is insufficient for this form of organisation to claim to approximate to non-hierarchy. In fact, in this context Child (1984:103) refers to 'the multiplication of hierarchies'.

Gerlach and Hine.

Thus, we are able to conclude that the extent to which non-hierarchical organisations have been identified by organisation theory is limited. It follows that systematic studies of organising activity in such situations are also in short supply, and that in order to develop an analytical approach to non-hierarchical organisations we must review the literature with a sense of piecing together suggestive clues, rather than in anticipation of encountering well-developed formulations.

III. HUMAN RELATIONS AND SOCIO-TECHNICAL SYSTEMS

The work of Mayo (1933, 1949) and other proponents of the human relations approach has been criticised (Bilton et al, 1981) for its managerial bias; as an attempt by management to retain the benefits of authority structures and the division of labour while avoiding their costs by using the social needs of workers to involve them in an integrated community of purpose. While it is undoubtedly true that the identification of informal groups was a major contribution of this early work to organisation theory; it was also true, as Kanter (1975:48) observes, that 'Informal organisation was studied more often among workers or between workers and supervisor, leaving the impression that only workers have informal ties - managers do not'. In their commentary on the Hawthorne investigations, Pugh et al (1983:163) restate 'informal ties' more strongly as 'spontaneous cooperation', a phrase which is part of classical anarchist terminology (see, for example, Ward, 1982), but make it clear that for Mayo, 'one of the major tasks of management is to organise spontaneous cooperation'. Thus, engaging in cooperative behaviour is something 'other people' do; this human attribute constitutes a tool for managers, while management itself remains distant. These observations are taken as

indicative of why seemingly little interest has been taken in how 'spontaneous cooperation' itself was organised. To view it solely as an outcome of 'natural' human behaviour removes a sense of the problematic which might otherwise invite closer scrutiny of how 'spontaneous cooperation' is constructed. We shall argue, on the basis of the empirical evidence, that the process of creating 'spontaneous cooperation' is not 'natural' but is one which involves negotiation and learning, and which requires the application of skills on the part of participants.

The importance of satisfying social and psychological needs in organisational settings, identified by Mayo, is taken up and developed in the work of Trist and his colleagues at the Tavistock Institute. The organisational practices they initiated had the twin intentions of continuing to improve the quality of working life and to create an organisation capable of operating efficiently within the newly-identified complex turbulent environment, attention to which was now seen as an important component of management practices. A good example here is the work of Rice (1958) in an Indian textile mill. The problem of an overstretched supervisor was solved by an arrangement which maximised the responsibility of the work group for its own internal organisation, 'thus freeing the supervisor for his <u>primary</u> task of boundary management' (Pugh et al, 1983:86, emphasis added). A similar pattern is evident in the work of Trist and Bamforth (1951). Following mechanisation in the coal industry the primary work groups which had characterised the pre-mechanisation period were dispersed. This led to production problems in the form of frequent stoppages, increased stress for the deputy (supervisor), and to the management complaining that they no longer had the support of the men. Trist and Bamforth's proposal in this situation was to pursue some means of incorporating the attributes of the pre-mechanisation work groups,

characterised as having 'responsible autonomy' with leadership and supervision internal to the group, into the requirements of the new technology. 'Only if this is done will the stress of the deputy's role be reduced and his task of maintaining the cycle receive spontaneous support from the primary work groups' (Trist and Bamforth, 1963: 415). By this means the workers at the coal face were allowed the human advantages of self-regulation and task variation within the confines of their task allocation, while at the same time freeing those at higher levels within the organisation from over-attention to internal matters.

The danger of inattention to environmental factors is instanced by such cautionary tales as the case of the canning firm which failed to appreciate the likely impact of frozen food. In terms of the internal design of organisations this awareness was translated into a requirement that organisations be flexible and adjustable (e.g. Hedburg et al, 1977, Nystrom and Starbuck, 1977, Westerlund and Sjöstrand, 1979), the requirement, in fact, that external turbulence is matched by internal turbulence. Thus the characteristics identified in 'naturally occurring' groups are consciously adopted; the one-man-one-task principle is abandoned in favour of task repertoires, direct supervision is replaced by group responsibility, collaboration replaces competition and an increased emphasis on participation reduces the emphasis on hierarchy. These innovations are expected to increase the involvement and commitment of organisational members leading to an increased capacity for risk-taking and innovation in response to the demands of the environment.

At this point, however, a note of caution must be introduced. Herbst (1976:38) reminds us that 'autonomous type groups have for the most part been implemented within the structure of existing hierarchical type organisation, specifically in bottom-up change

strategies, and thus built at least temporarily into an at least partially inconsistent context', and, on the basis of his own work, argues that 'the total task will need to be within a feasible range' (1976:33). From this we take two points. First, job design projects which introduce autonomous, non-hierarchical groups typically do so in relation to a specified and contained task (such as assembling cars - see, for example, Child, 1984:39) and second, such innovations take place within a total organisational context which may be more or less accommodative (Child, 1984, Pettigrew, 1985) but which will, in any case, retain a basically hierarchical form. The focus thus remains on the managerial tasks which circumscribe the activities of the autonomous work group. For example, Miller (1975) in re-examining the work in Indian textile mills 'reinforce(s) the point long made by Tavistock Institute writers that management has a key function in managing boundary conditions, and it suggests that autonomous working groups cannot readily handle high levels of uncertainty unless they receive adequate training and their members have the necessary ability' (Child, 1984:44). We shall return to the question of training and ability. At present we may note that even in Herbst's (1976) work for the Norwegian navy, where differentials between officers and men were considerably reduced, little interest is taken in how these novel configurations are constituted. His primary interest in discovering the potential size of non-hierarchical organisations leaves unexamined the question of how such organisations organise themselves. 'This type of organisation . . . can adopt any temporary structure which is judged by the members to be appropriate at any one time' (1976:32). It is clear in this case and from the field work data that in situations where such 'managerial' tasks as task definition and boundary management are not removed from non-hierarchical groupings through containment within a larger structure, they must form a component of the processes

of such groups. Therefore, any group which is engaged in attempting to implement a complete (i.e. non-bounded) form of non-hierarchical organisation must be concerned to devise ways of distributing 'managerial', as well as executive, tasks within the group. Kerr and Jermier (1983) have suggested that leadership may be redundant in certain settings, one of which is when subordinates find the task intrinsically motivating and have all the skill and knowledge they need. Our argument will be that, while leadership in the formal hierarchical sense may be redundant, or, more accurately, unacceptable in non-hierarchical settings, leadership acts must still be accomplished by some means if successful organisation is to be achieved.

The apparent lack of interest in the organising processes of non-hierarchical groups within organisation theory is explained by the discussion above, but it is not excused. An investigation of this area is argued to be of interest in itself and, bearing in mind the remarks of Westerlund and Sjöstrand (page 15) concerning forms of control and task allocation, of importance for the development of organisation theory. Drawing together the suggestions so far, it appears likely that non-hierarchical organisation depends on the skills, abilities and knowledge of participants, and on them devising a means of exercising these skills etc. in a way which does not reproduce hierarchy. We must also inquire into the motivation which impels attempts to construct non-hierarchical organisation and to this we now turn.

IV. HUMAN RESOURCES

One uninterested commentator suggests how we may proceed. Concluding his discussion of the philosophy of anarchism Read (1954:51) states, 'I have said little about the actual organisation of an anarchist community . . . The main thing is to establish the principles -

the principles of equity, of individual freedom, of worker control. The community then aims at the establishment of these principles from the starting point of local needs and local conditions'.[2] The clear assumption is that there is some connection to be made between principles or values which inform organising activity and the nature of the organisation which ensues. What we may term the 'moral' component of the Human Relations approach - the attention to self-direction and self-actualisation - has been developed and given more widespread application in the Human Resources approach, notably in the work of McGregor, Likert and Argyris. Argyris (1957, 1965) uses the observation we have already made to draw attention to the constricting effects of 'pyramidal values'. Due, he believes, to low levels of interpersonal competence in managers, organisations are unable to fully utilise the capacities of their individual members. Thus, faced with two conflicting value systems (see below, McGregor, 1960), individual members are in the paradoxical position of being required to, for example, take initiatives, but not to violate rules. The primary problem, as Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978) see it, is not that such paradoxes exist, but that typically the prevailing organisational climate does not permit such issues to be discussed and resolved.

McGregor's (1960) classic formulation of 'pyramidal values' and 'cooperative values' as Theory X and Theory Y is composed in terms of alternative assumptions about the nature of human motivation. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, it is less important to engage in debates, the terms of which are clearly over-dichotomised, about the 'true' nature of human beings, than to focus on the form of

2. There is sufficient agreement about the parameters which define anarchist communities and non-hierarchical organisations for us to treat them as identical. See Ehrlich, 1979.

relationships implied in such formulations and relate these to processes of organisational structuring. Thus the emphasis on external direction and control via the process of direct supervision under simple hierarchies is replaced, as in Likert and Likert's System 4T (1976), by advocacy of group-based organisation and the 'principle of supportive relationships'. The types of relationships which have been assumed to occur within autonomous work groups are now seen to have useful application at higher levels in the organisation. The intention underlying these innovations is to find a way of directing the positively identified aspects of human behaviour in ways which are congruent with the needs of the organisation; ideally both individual and organisational goals will be met simultaneously. 'It means that (the individual) will continuously be encouraged to develop and utilise voluntarily his capacities, his knowledge, his skill, his ingenuity in ways which contribute to the success of the enterprise.' (McGregor, 1984:332) However, McGregor warns us that this intent in no way implies an abdication of management. The task of constructing commitment to the attainment of organisational objectives remains its domain.

An examination of Likert's work along similar lines leads us to question how far developments in organisations which are 'employee centred' and structured around group-based participation processes may be contained within a system which remains fundamentally hierarchical. System 4 management (1961), later developed as System 4T (Likert and Likert, 1976), meets the 'efficiency' criteria of high productivity, greater involvement of individuals and better labour-management relations when compared with other systems of management. It is characterised by participative group management - a series of groups throughout the organisation linked together by individuals who are members of more than one group. Likert has enquired more closely than

some into the nature of relationships in this type of organisation and his observations (or, perhaps, prescriptions) are interesting. As a counter to the low level of interpersonal competence identified by Argyris, he states (1984:295), 'sensitivity to others and relatively high levels of skill in personal interaction and the functioning of groups are . . . present. These skills permit effective participation in decisions on common problems'. His description of the effectively functioning group as one which is 'pressing for solutions in the best interests of all members and refusing to accept solutions which unduly favour a particular member or segment of the group' (1984:306, emphasis in original) anticipates the similar descriptions we shall find in the women's movement. However, while Likert reduces the importance of hierarchy within the system it is not removed, and all his prescriptions are presented in terms of leaders and subordinates. The validity of this position becomes questionable when posed in terms of the accumulated skills of participants. For example, the observation that, 'these people become experienced in effective group functioning. They know what leadership involves . . . The members will help by performing leadership functions' (1984:308, emphasis added), may be taken as indication of some spread of 'leadership' between ordinary group members irrespective of the existence of a nominal group leader. Similarly, the remark that 'hierarchical status acts as a strong deterrent on the willingness of group members to speak up'(1976:157), leads to a position where status differentials are increasingly deemphasised. The logic of this position leads Likert to make two, regrettably brief, references to the possibility of a System 5 organisation which is described (1976:33) as 'an even more effective, complex and socially evolved management and social system . . . It appears it will have the structure and interaction processes of System 4 but will lack the authority of hierarchy.'

In Likert's view organisations which deal effectively with intraorganisational conflict and are appropriately poised to meet changing conditions must have a structure which facilitates constructive interaction, have personnel skilled in these processes and show high levels of trust and motivation. It appears that there is an incompatibility between this type of structure and one which is, to any degree, hierarchically structured. For there to be an 'adequate degree of harmony between organisational objectives and the needs and desires of individual members' the 'organisation' (or its management) cannot be superior to the organisation as a cooperative of members. (1964:313) If this is the case we must look elsewhere for the sources of motivation which McGregor insists are the concern of management. It is here proposed that a key to alternative sources of motivation will be found along the 'moral' dimension to which we have already referred. The social application of the psychological insights brought to the field of organisation theory (e.g. Herzberg, 1976) makes statements about the nature of interpersonal relationships. We may assume that if psychological 'goods', such as self-regulation, are seen as valuable in themselves (as well as contributing to organisational effectiveness), then there is also a value component to the interaction processes which are the enactment of these psychological 'goods'. This will lead us to seek instances of non-hierarchical organisation in situations where there is support for them in terms of the value system which informs organising activity - where motivation, in some part at least, depends on seeing the form of organising activity as valuable in itself. This is done in Chapter 3, where the examination of organising activity in the women's movement shows that the preferred mode of organising is valued by participants.

One final note. Mangham (1979:140-141) sees problems in implementing the intentions of the human resources approach. In his

view there is little evidence for the existence of supportive and 'open' relationships in general society.[3] Those who attempt to work in this way are faced with the difficulty that there are 'no scripts to follow'. '(The) call must be seen for what it is, a challenge to society not simply behaviour at work.' This view makes it probable that the assumptions of Theory Y (McGregor, 1984:326-327) have more chance of implementation in organisational settings which espouse innovation and challenge - as is the case in social movement organisations such as Women's Centres.

V. APPROACHES TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF ORGANISATIONS

In recent years the study of organisations has been dominated by a systems perspective (see, for example, Burrell and Morgan, 1979, Silverman, 1970). This approach, as we have already indicated, focusses attention primarily on organisation/environment interchanges and interorganisational relationships. This has led to two interconnected criticisms - that by so doing the organisation per se is over-constructed and assumes an unjustifiable reification, while the activities of participants as crucial to the construction of an organisation are under-emphasised. (e.g. Giddens, 1985, Elger, 1975, Hosking and Morley, 1982.) Acceptance of these criticisms makes it imperative that attention is directed towards the dynamic aspects of organisation; to treat organisation as activity, and moreover, activity which is historically and contextually located (Burowoy, 1979, Pettigrew, 1985). By this means we seek to avoid reductionism and, consequently, determinism. As Yeo (1976:9) remarks, 'abstracting an organisational type from system, place and time can lead to deadeningly misplaced sociological determinism of the kind pioneered by Michels'.

3. See also F.E. Emery and E.L. Trist, 1969.

In addition, by conceptualising organisation as activity, it is possible to avoid being drawn into unrewarding debates concerning the ontological status of organisations. As Burrell and Morgan (1979:398) observe, 'The notion that one can measure an organisation as an empirical facticity is as extreme as the notion that organisations do not exist'. It is clear that approaches to organisation which counterpose structure and process, the formal and the informal, or constraint and choice, as dichotomous options can produce logical types whose value is more in redressing a perceived balance in theoretical development than, in themselves, contributing to a holistic analysis of organisational activity. Such an analysis is a more complex endeavour than it is perhaps comfortable to acknowledge. We shall return to this point after continuing to briefly outline the main areas of the organisational literature. (See page 38.)

1. Systems Theory

So far we have identified the pervasiveness of hierarchical assumptions in the organisational literature and the curiously unexamined nature of autonomous or semi-autonomous groups, seen as having a self-regulatory quality which frees higher-level organisational members for the task of managing 'boundary interchanges'. This approach, as Gouldner (1959) reminds us, can be traced back to Comte's description of 'natural' and 'spontaneous' social organisation which, via the human relations approach, now finds its expression in cybernetic versions of systems theory where 'organisational structures are viewed as spontaneously and homeostatically maintained' by means of 'shared values which are deeply internalised in the members'. (Gouldner, 1959:405) These assumptions of shared values permit an entitative view of the organisation, 'with a "natural history" of its own' (ibid, 1959:406), while leaving unexamined the precise operation

of 'dynamic homeostasis' or 'equilibrium' (see, for example, Simon, 1957, Katz and Kahn, 1978). The other side of this coin, deriving from Weber's typification of the rational-bureaucratic model of organisations, constructs the organisation as an 'instrument', 'as a rationally conceived means to the realization of expressly announced group goals' (Gouldner, 1959:404). In this version the formal rather than the informal aspect of organisation is dominant; nevertheless, we are still presented with the implication that organisational structures, however produced, are amenable to observers' definitions - that is, they have the status of a social fact.

This view is made possible if, following Parsons (1960), it is assumed that society is characterised by generalised consensus values. On this point we shall argue that the identification of shared 'core values' which inform organising activity does not imply that consensus can be assumed. The contrary view is outlined on page 34ff. Within organisational analysis, consensus assumptions have permitted treatment of the organisation as a unity with explicit goals and clear operating procedures. Thus the relationship between structure, function and normative order appears unproblematic, since pertinent values designate the organisational goal and inform all aspects of organisational structure. No analytical errors are made by holding attention at the macro level while investigating contingent organisational responses to variations in, for example, technology (Woodward, 1965, Khandwalla, 1974) or environment (Aldrich, 1979); the crucial issue for them remains goal attainment as the expression of organisational effectiveness. Within this model organisations are characterised by equilibrium processes and role-determined behaviour on the part of the participants. Determinism is so profound that even within 'open socio-technical systems' (e.g. Emery and Trist, 1960) where the problem of a changed environment is faced, structural

elaboration does not modify the organisational goal or 'primary task'.

Elger (1975) has pointed out that while there is theoretical variation between system theorists (see Silverman, 1970) as, for example, in Gouldner's discussion, 'these differences appear marginal beside the disagreements with their critics' (Elger, 1975:127), and it is to these criticisms which we now turn.

2. Criticisms and Alternatives

We shall here look at critiques from interactionist (and ethnomethodological) and from marxist schools of thought which draw our attention to the need to incorporate micro and macro levels of analysis in the understanding of organisations, but we note that without a means of connecting these two levels of analysis the explication of processes is incomplete. Pursuing Pettigrew's criticism (page 12) of organisational research as 'ahistorical, acontextual and aprocessual' we seek a means of constructing organisational analysis in terms of connectable vertical and horizontal components. Using the action critique 'forces us to attend to the processes through which particular organisational patterns have been generated and are sustained' (Benson, 1977:8), and this implies attention to history, context and day-to-day interaction patterns. We are concerned to retain the voluntaristic aspects of organisation while, at the same time, locating organisational actors in a contextual framework, and here negotiated order theory is useful. Specifically, in this research, we shall be exploring the arena of negotiation between action and its symbolic referents, which in this case are the values to which we have already referred. In terms of analytical strategy we note that the adoption of different temporal perspectives (by the analyst) provides a means of 'unpacking' the full complexity of organisation which is indicated by the critics of systems theory.

a) The interactionist critique

The above, entitative, view of organisations is subject to Giorgiou's criticism - namely that when an organisation is considered from this perspective, it is seen as 'not merely greater than the sum of its parts, but so superior that it is effectively divorced from the influence of its parts' (Giorgiou, 1973:77). Thus the corollary to the promotion of organisational goals and structures is the neglect of participants' involvement and actions. Writers within the interactionist tradition (e.g. Bittner, 1974, Silverman, 1970) insist that an analytical approach must take account of the way in which actors actively and variously interpret, create and respond to organisational settings; it is an unwarranted reduction to assume 'the docility of organisational members vis-a-vis administrative instructions' (Elger, 1975:94). In Bittner's view this reduction derives from over-identification with the efficiency principle 'which merely selects, identifies and orders those elements of a scene of action that are percieved as related to it . . . Instead, one is confronted with a rich and ambiguous body of background information' (ibid, 1974:72-73). The same observation leads Nord (1977) to note an over preoccupation with the identification of problems from a managerial perspective as identical with the actuality of organisational life - the 'integrative assumption - and for Korman and Vrendenburgh (1984), among others, to argue for a 'more comprehensive understanding of networks of relationships within multi-layered models' (ibid, 1984:235).

Acceptance of these criticisms demands certain modifications to the dominant mode of research in organisations. As we have already noted the interactionist perspective is important in drawing attention to the existence of individual agendas within organisational settings (Perrow, 1978) and, consequently to the fact that members participate in an active and variable manner (Strauss, 1978), a point which is obscured when role-determined behaviour is treated unproblematically.

b) The marxist critique

This urge to attend to micro levels of analysis is balanced by arguments, frequently from a marxist perspective, which propose that 'explanations of organisational phenomena cannot be sought within the boundaries of the organisation' (Benson, 1977:11). In this view (see, for example, Salaman, 1978, Burowoy, 1979, Heydebrand, 1977) organisations are, in part at least, loci for the expression of class interests and reflect within them the inequalities of power which are the defining characteristics of capitalist society. Thus, in general terms, the plea from this quarter (Salaman, 1979:519) is for a sociology of organisations which 'takes as its topic to be investigated exactly that which is assumed and glossed over by contemporary organisational analysis: the relationship between internal organisational structures, processes and ideologies and the society in which these exist'. The importance of this perspective for organisational analysis is that it offers a means of incorporating context and history and, as such, is counterposed to efforts 'aimed at a general theory of organisational behaviour, generalisable across time and place' (Davies, 1981:6). We are also provided with a means of connecting micro and macro levels of analysis but as Pettigrew (1985) observes, the simple determinism of the presentation reduced its appeal: 'Salaman (1979) offers no theoretical language or logical argument of why and how societal and intraorganisational power and political processes are interrelated.' (Pettigrew, 1985:30) It is only in instances where attempts have been made to confront the 'rich and ambiguous body of background information' through ethnographic studies (e.g. Willis, 1977, Beynon, 1975) that we see moves to include process, as well as context and history, as intrinsic to the analysis.

At this point a short digression is in order. Marxist approaches to organisational analysis are posed in terms of different interest groups (classes) under capitalism, which are understood in

relation to their differential access to resources and the maintenance of these differentials. To the extent to which the terms of the discussion are wholly located within the problematic of capitalist production and reproduction, the relevance to organisational settings, such as Women's Centres, which are not specifically of this type, must be questioned. The relationships between marxism and feminism, between class and patriarchy are complex, and have been debated in terms of both incorporation and separation (Sargent, 1981). The view is taken here that, while the constraints and structural processes of capitalist production cannot be claimed to be totally absent, it is reasonable to claim that they intrude less directly and immediately than is the case for the majority of settings where organisational behaviour is studied. This observation provides one justification for rejecting an interest base in favour of a value base for affiliation, although we must also note that it is relatively unusual for this distinction to receive much attention in the organisational literature. Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood (1980), for example, discuss 'values and interests' as an undifferentiated bundle. Westerlund and Sjöstrand (1979) are exceptional in that they consider it important to differentiate in this respect, particularly when seeking descriptions of organisational processes.

In this research, the emphasis on values as the <u>primary</u> basis for affiliation is suggested by the above observations, and receives reinforcement from an examination of the empirical data. Class differences between participants may be part of the dynamics of organisation within Women's Centres, but it will be shown that, essentially, it is differences in such factors as familiarity with the women's movement and in the nature or extent of skills or knowledge held by participants which require negotiation in the process of creating non-hierarchical organisation. These and similar factors may

be understood as effects of class differences; they may also have some other basis. It is not considered that social organisation in the settings we are interested in occurs primarily with reference to classes or interests.

c) The action critique and negotiated order theory

A number of writers (e.g. Benson, 1977, Giddens, 1976, Perrow, 1978) have pointed to the convergence of marxism and ethnomethodology in their (action) critique of conventional approaches as depicting a singular organisational reality. As Benson describes it:

> The action critique forces us to attend to the processes through which particular organisational patterns have been generated and are sustained. Explanations based solely in the morphology of a produced, taken-for-granted reality are no longer acceptable. This forces attention to history, to the sequence of events and contexts through which the present arrangements have been manufactured. It also directs attention to the ongoing, day-to-day interactions through which a produced reality is sustained.
>
> (1977:8)

This alternative approach makes two demands on organisational analysis. First, that inquiry must be wider than the narrow confines of conventionally understood organisational boundaries, and second, that 'structure' must be reconceptualised to include its dynamic and dialectic aspects.

On the first point we may return to Salaman's plea to locate organisation theory in its societal context. Open systems theory (e.g. Katz and Kahn, 1978) produced simple models of input and output in an attempt to indicate the permeable nature of organisational boundaries, but this and similar attempts have been roundly criticised by at least one author. Pettigrew (1985:73) considers that 'the inert, actionless brand of functionalism in open systems theory, and the equally mechanical attempts to codify and measure inter-organisational relationships led nowhere'. Even the more developed and complex work of Aldrich (1979) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) is subject to the

criticism, in Aldrich's case, of ecological determinism and, in the case of Pfeffer and Salancik, of conceptualising the environment as largely composed of other organisations. Taking up the 'sociological' criticism, Lammers (1979) argues for interest to be taken in the 'cultural aspects and cultural determinants of organisational behaviour' (ibid, 1979:99) but, leaving aside for the moment the question of the viability of 'culture' as a concept, we may note that Lammers' reluctance to abandon the aim of building a general - and hence, unlocated - theory of organisations prejudices his own espousal of his initial prescription. The dilemma here is that, while it can be argued that conventional organisation theory is too partial and too ready to accept analytical closure in its debates to be at present in a position to construct a general theory, the alternative can be to espouse a complexity which threatens to become 'unresearchable'. The suggestions for a way out of this impasse are limited. For example Heydebrand's (1977) formulation of organisations as an 'instrument of class struggle', which is intended to improve on the treatment of organisations as 'actors', is subject to the criticism of determinism we have already noted, and further, this determinism leads some marxist writers (e.g. Clegg and Dunkerley, 1977) to question the ontological assumption of the organisation as a separate reality. It is argued that the question only arises in this form because the vertical components in the analysis are not subject to sufficient scrutiny. In response we may return to the point that participants' involvements and definitions have a crucial part to play (see, for example, Bittner, 1974).

Attention to the voluntaristic aspects of organisations leads on to our second point - that 'structure' must be reconceptualised in a way which transcends its static connotations. Writers who have

addressed this issue have sought to incorporate a temporal dimension, whether retrospective or prospective, or to find some way of indicating the processual and active dimensions of structure. Thus, Perrow (1979:117) says 'that what we see as structure is only the trace of past movement', while Silverman(in Pugh et al, 1983:93) sees structures as 'immanent', 'continuously constructed and reconstructed out of the meanings that actors take from them and give to them'. Similarly Strauss (1978) discusses 'structural processes', and Giddens (1984), in the most fully developed version, presents a theory of structuration. In common, the point is made that human behaviour cannot be fully understood simply by reference to a normative order or a set of rules (Morgan, 1975), and crucially the implied determinism here is mitigated by attention to the arena of action between behaviour and its symbolic referents - whether expressed in terms of goals (Strauss et al, 1963), rules (Morgan, 1975) or values (MacIver, 1963). Within this arena actors, both individually and collectively, bring to organisational encounters differences in interests, perceptions, values and resources in a process which is inherently 'political' (Pettigrew, 1973). In these terms social order is shaped, in some part, by participants acting in a 'self-conscious' (Day & Day, 1977) and 'reflexive' (Argyris and Schon, 1978) manner, and a serious challenge is made to what may be taken for granted within organisational analysis. Attention to the mediating social processes which interpose between reference points or end-states, and their implementation in day-to-day organisational activities highlights the ambiguous and conditional nature of much that is involved in 'making' organisational actions (Elger, 1975). Thus Day and Day (1977:134) characterise negotiated order theory as,

> (emphasising) the fluid, continuously emerging qualities of the organisation, the changing web of interactions woven among its members, and (suggesting) that order is something at which the members of the organisation must

> continually work. Consequently, conflict and change are just as much a part of organisational life as consensus and stability. Organisations are thus viewed as complex and highly fragile constructions of reality which are subject to the numerous temporal, spatial, and situational events occurring both internally and externally . . . (This) involves the historical development of the organisation . . . as well as those relevant changes taking place within the broader social, political and economic spectrum of the organisation.

This approach clearly has much to offer as an alternative to structural theory in its emphasis on process and context. However, it is also important, as Giddens (1964:26) has warned, to avoid the excesses of phenomenology in regarding society 'as the plastic creation of human subjects'. The debate between Strauss (1978) and his critics (Day and Day, 1977) has drawn attention to some concerns about the phenomenological aspects of negotiated order theory. First, there is a criticism of a failure of practice, if not of intent, to adequately locate negotiative processes in their contextual framework and thus to relate macro-level issues to what occurs within the organisation. Second (Benson, 1977), negotiated order theorists may have fallen into the error of disregarding structural limits by focussing on the small-scale adjustments possible within the limits posed by structural arrangements. In response Strauss has argued (1978:249-259) that these criticisms derive from a misreading of some aspects of negotiated order theory. Examples are offered of how it may be applicable to large-scale structural problems and reorganisations (e.g. international negotiations) and attention is drawn to the importance of discovering 'just what is negotiable at any given time' (ibid, 1978:252). However, for Strauss 'the nub of the debate lies in the question of where the analyst or theorist chooses to put his or her structural emphasis' (ibid, 1978:254).

d) Implications for analysis

Strauss is clear that the observation of 'structure' is a function of the temporal perspective adopted by the analyst, such that 'structure' becomes the label attached to larger-scale and/or longer-term process. This version is stated by Gerson (1976:796).

> My approach rests on the assumption that both social order and individuals arise in and through a process of ongoing negotiation about who shall be whom and what order shall pertain. These negotiations may take place on relatively small scales or on large scales (through the activities of many people over a large area over a long period of time). In fact, we have a general situation in which small-scale negotiations are continually taking place in very large numbers within the context of the larger-scale arrangements which are changing more slowly and less visibly to participants.
>
> (emphasis in original)

From this perspective the analytical task becomes one of explicating structural process - that is, of identifying the various structural properties which are operating, or may be brought to operate, on the phases of the negotiative process and in analysing their processual and interactional linkages.

We have now gone some way towards identifying the requirement for connectable vertical (synchronic) and horizontal (processual) components in organisational analysis (see, for example, Pettigrew, 1985). Giddens (1984) has dealt with the tension between agents and structure by proposing that these two sets of phenomena are taken together as a duality, such that, 'the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organise'. (ibid, 1984:25 emphasis added) This formulation makes it imperative that a temporal dimension is added to our understanding of structure: 'The structural properties of social systems exist only in so far as forms of social conduct are reproduced chronically across time and space. The structuration of institutions can be understood in terms of how it comes about that social actitivities become

'stretched' across wide spans of time-space' (ibid, 1984:xxi). Structure is thus both constraining and enabling:

> (It) has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity . . . But human knowledgeability is always bounded. The flow of action continually produces consequences which are unintended by actors, and these unintended consequences also may form unacknowledged conditions of action in a feedback fashion.
>
> (ibid, 1976:25-26)

In this way Giddens feels able to insist on the importance of intentional activity, while not making the mistake of believing there is no more to be said. Placing the emphasis this way, of course, runs counter to Marx's well-known pronouncement on history, by which the creativity of actors appears of little weight beside the inevitability of larger social forces.

Ranson et al (1980) have also examined the importance of attaching a temporal dimension to organisational analysis and, by drawing attention to the different insights afforded by different temporal perspectives, to argue for a more unified approach to method and theory. In terms of the three temporal perspectives they identify (ibid, 1980:14),

> We would expect actors and transactional patterns to be determinate in the uncertain day-to-day experience of organisations; emergent regularities and constraints of size, technology, and environment to become apparent in the medium term; and an order of meaning, value and belief to be sedimented in the long-term structuring of organisations and their contexts.

By this means they evoke the possibility of a more holistic approach to analysis, which transcends the seemingly disparate viewpoints offered by phenomenology, traditional ahistorical approaches and broader sociohistorical perspectives. Structure thus becomes (ibid, 1980:3) 'a complex medium of control which is continually produced and recreated in interaction and yet shapes that interaction: structures are constituted and constitutive'. There is much that is to be welcomed

here. However, there is also evidence of some theoretical short-circuitry. Having produced a suitably dynamic and dialectic definition of structure the authors apparently regress into a more static mode which allows them to make statements (ibid, 1980:3) which begin, 'Having generated an appropriate structure . . . ', and later (ibid, 1980:6) to cite the work of Thompson (1973) who has argued that organisation members tend to develop organisational frameworks in ways which are 'symbolically appropriate' to their values. There is a danger of incipient determinism (c.f. p 12) here if sufficient attention is not given to the connectedness of the three temporalities, which must be redressed by close attention to the arena we have already indicated - that which exists between action and its symbolic referents. If we argue, or observe, that people cooperate on the basis of shared core values we must be clear what we do, and do not, understand to flow from this. The relationship between values and action may be unclear, ambiguous and disputed. In this thesis we shall show that organising activity in Women's Centres occurs with reference to a shared set of core values. We shall also show that the relationship between values and action is one which is negotiated by participants and that the terms of the negotiation and the arenas in which negotiation takes place vary over time and between settings. We are able to identify a general requirement that actions be legitimated by linking them to values, but that the process by which this legitimacy of action is demonstrated is political and depends on such factors as access to information, the extent of commitment or the ability to raise issues or to prevent them being raised. While the identification of value-based reference points may form a constant monitoring parameter of action, action cannot be held to be wholly determined by such a reference.

The above discussion and examination of the organisational literature is intended to convey the view that an adequate understanding

of organisational phenomena must involve horizontal and vertical analytical components and their interrelation. We have already noted that this represents a complex endeavour and contains the potential for casting the research net so widely that the problem threatens to attain 'unresearchable' dimensions. Pragmatically, however, the usual constraints of time and/or resources act to contain this unbounded potentiality. Nevertheless, it is argued as necessary that the researcher retain an awareness of the full scope and complexity of the issues under scrutiny, while accepting that in practical terms it may not be possible to explore fully everything that is implied in the definition of the problem. In this research the environmental context of the study area has not been examined in as much detail as a larger study would permit. We are therefore not able to provide any answers to questions relating to, for example, environmental factors affecting the inception of Women's Centres in different locations, which are prior to the existence of a particular Centre. In most cases the environmental context is 'seen' from the perspective of the Centre. The details of the research design are provided in Chapter 2.

VI. SUMMARY AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

1. Summary of Discussion of Non-Hierarchical Organisation

In this overview of the main themes in the organisational literature a partiality of attention has been noted which has left under-examined some aspects of organisational behaviour which are of particular pertinence to the study of Women's Centres, taken as an example of a type of organisation which seeks to operate in a non-hierarchical and collectivist mode. In particular, it has been pointed out that 'organisation' is generally assumed to take place within an hierarchical context and that this assumption has limited examination of the process of 'spontaneous cooperation' in the settings

where it is presumed to occur. We have suggested that it is insufficient to adopt an 'efficiency' rationale towards understanding the inception and maintenance of non-hierarchical groupings, and that it is also necessary to take account of the 'moral' or value component in such agreements to cooperate. This value dimension - defined as a basic attitude toward certain broad modes of conduct or certain end-states of existence (Rokeach, 1968, 1973) - is important in providing a motor to drive the process of constructing a particular social order. Gerson (1976:797) in his discussion of commitment organisation, has commented, 'Participation in any situation . . . is simultaneously constraining in that people must make contributions to it, and be bound by its limitations and yet enriching, in that participation provides resources and opportunities otherwise unavailable'. In drawing attention to the fact that social organisation offers its participants rewards which are, crucially, a product of interaction, and (McGregor, 1960) that different forms of organisation provide different interaction products, we are able to see that the establishment (or attempted establishment) of a social order with particular characteristics can be valuable in itself in terms of the rewards and opportunities which it offers to its participants. Further, we may reflect Salaman's (1980) observation that the apparent logical base of many organisational rationalities is, in fact, founded on value premises. In these terms the 'efficiency' rationale appears as an example of managerial values, and points to the need to acknowledge the value component in all explications of processes of social organisation.

2. The Role of Values in Organisation

Taking the problem of social order and organisation within Women's Centres as our primary focus invites comparison with other investigations of organisations which fall outside the mainstream of

organisation theory. Examples include Abrams and McCullough's (1976) work on communes, Thompson's (1973) on religious organisations, and Gerlach and Hine's (1970) examination of social movements. In common, these writers draw attention to the role played in organisational structuring and processual activities of values, ideology, and symbolism. Gerlach and Hine (1970:60) consider that, 'the ideology is perhaps the key to the infrastructure of the movement', while Thompson (1973:301) observes that 'religious organisations are judged not only for their efficiency, but also for their symbolic appropriateness'. However, while the importance of these views is accepted in providing an orientation towards organisational analysis, the lack of clarity surrounding such terms as 'culture' and 'ideology' may produce difficulties (see, for example, Rose, Kamin and Lewontin (1984), Pettigrew (1985)). These terms are more accurately seen as conceptual clusters which include language, beliefs, values, myths and symbols. In terms of the need to connect means and ends in ways which are not over-deterministic and which attend to the voluntaristic aspects of human behaviour (Martins, 1974), the requirement is for analytical tools which refer to both means and ends and provide a way of describing their interrelatedness. Rokeach's (1968) formulation of 'values' as applying to both modes of conduct and desired end-states provides the necessary connection.

However, we have already noted, while both action and its symbolic referents may be expressed in terms of agreement about a shared set of core values, particular attention must be paid to the arena of negotiation between the two. To do otherwise is to fall into the trap of determinism which arises from the Parsonian sense of consensus values. For this reason Martins (1974:267) prefers to distinguish between 'valuations' and 'values'; 'values as schemata of valuations, actual valuations being susceptible to wide margins of

indeterminacy, variation and fluctuation'. The role of values as a source of meanings and in the creation of a shared sense of social order is widely accepted but, in making this point Emery and Trist (1965:28) also observe, 'values are not strategies or tactics; . . . they have the conceptual character of "power fields" and act as injunctions'. The importance of this statement and of Martins' is given weight by placing it in an empirical context, as Thompson (1973) does. Having noted that little empirical work has been done on the correspondence between religious symbols and the organisational forms favoured by religious groups, he points out (ibid, 1973:300) that 'one of the main sources of conflict in religious organisations . . . is the fact that religious symbols cannot in practice be broken down very easily into specifiable empirical conditions without generating controversy'. Thus, the strategies, tactics and actions which are involved in achieving and maintaining (which includes changing) social organisation arise from processes which are 'political' (Pettigrew, 1973) and involve negotiation (Strauss, 1978). This point remains true, as Thompson shows (1973:293), in cases where 'the end is achieved in the process of meeting with others', and similarly holds for Women's Centres where it is found that one aspect of the social order is characterised by values which sanction 'distributed influence', both as a mode of conduct and as a desired end-state (Brown and Hosking, 1986).

It must be emphasised that while it is possible to identify agreement about a shared set of core values which refer to both a mode of conduct and a desired end-state, it is considered unlikely that participants will share all values and cognitions and the potential for conflict is maintained. As Rothschild-Whitt (1982:44) has observed, 'inequalities of influence persist in the most equalitarian organisation'; it is to be expected that participants will vary in the

skills and resources which they are able (or choose) to bring to the process of constructing a social order. Taking a longitudinal perspective introduces the variability into the enactment of values which Martins (1974) identifies. Strauss (1978:259) reminds us that the realm of negotiability is mutable with respect to the resources - 'time, money, skill, information, boldness or perhaps desperation' - which are brought to bear on it. It is the task of the analyst to identify ways in which negotiative processes within the organisation and in relation to its environment are themselves negotiated over time through differential access to and application of resources. However, not all applications of resources are equally weighted, equally acceptable or equally valued in their contribution to the production and maintenance of social order. They must also be identified as valid in terms of the core values which characterise the social order in question. Therefore, the political processes associated with the acquisition and deployment of resources already referred to must be extended to include 'politics as the management of meaning' (Pettigrew, 1985:44). By this means the cultural component of social organisation is intimately linked, via the concept of legitimacy, to processes within the organisation and its immediate environmental context.

3. Summary of Analytical Approach

Returning to the question raised (page 38) concerning the generation of organisational structures appropriate to the core values of the organisation's members, we are now in a position to propose that the processes involved here are complex and subject to negotiation at a number of levels. Specifically, three vertically interconnected levels are identified; the group, the environmental context and the cultural context. They are connected by means of a set of core values which both monitor present-time conduct and provide propulsion towards

a desired end-state. Temporal variation in this process is identified through differential access to and ability to create resources, differential responses to constraints in the environment and to the ability to create opportunities, and differential empirical specification of the cultural injunctions. In this way, 'context is neither treated just as descriptive background nor used to drive a simple deterministic explanation' (Pettigrew, 1985:49); essentially structure and process are conceived as mutually constituted and constitutive (Giddens, 1984, Ranson et al, 1980) through the activities of knowledgeable actors who seek to achieve certain ends in a manner which is consistent with those ends. Principally then, the intention here is to describe and explicate the manner in which participants in Women's Centres understand and seek to enact a social order which is identified by the same basic value parameters, but which inhabits different physical and social locations, and in so doing are able to assume or seek out different resources and to make different assessments of their purpose. It is argued that a full understanding of organising activity can only derive from an analytical approach which seeks to examine both the interaction of different point-in-time perspectives and simultaneously to consider these as part of a processual flow, such that action is constructed on its contextual base and is at the same time part of the process of creating that context.

CHAPTER 2

Research Concepts and Data Base

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH CONCEPTS AND DATA BASE

I. INTRODUCTION

The present research is directed towards exploring the structural processes which pertain in organisations which are set up by women for women and make reference to the women's movement. These organisations are typically non-hierarchical, non-profit making and dependent on voluntary workers. They thus exhibit few of the conventional parameters of organisational analysis such as payment systems, defined boundaries and advancement structures, but unlike, for example, communes, are set up in response to a perceived need for the provision of services.

The present paucity of research accounts of similar organisations made it inevitable that the initial perspective was ethnographic - directed towards clear accounts of the ongoing processes. Given the little that is known (in organisational terms) about Women's Centres it would have been difficult and, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) have argued, inappropriate, to commence the study with detailed hypotheses and non-negotiable *a priori* assumptions. However, a number of preliminary questions were of course formulated, prompted by the nature of the field setting and the theoretical problems it appeared to pose. For example, what are identifiable as communalities in the styles of feminist organisations? How does a non-hierarchical organisation relate to an essentially bureaucratic environment? How does it seek to recruit and to retain the commitment of participants? How is the question of leadership dealt with by the organisation and what is the distribution of power, both within the organisation and in its relationship with the environment?

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The emphasis which has been placed on the need to identify the cultural components of and the negotiative processes inherent in the production of social organisation, has also pointed to the importance of organisational analysis which counters the criticism 'ahistorical, acontextual and aprocessual' (see page 25). This being the case the conceptual framework of the research design was, to some extent, modified by the process of longitudinal involvement with and greater understanding of the research locations. In this sense the research method and the theoretical approach are congruent. The relatively fragile and temporary forms of organisation found within the women's movement are seen to take on a different meaning when attention is shifted from the organisation per se to the notion of a particular ideological perspective, or set of core values, whose enactment and articulation can be identified in a variety of individual and collective expressions. This approach is indicated by Burrell and Morgan (1979:311) as one which 'stresses the importance of the mode of organisation reflecting a particular totality, rather than the importance of organisations as discrete middle-range units' (emphasis in original). Thus, by focussing principally on 'organising activity' (Weick, 1979) rather than organisational form, it becomes possible to account for periods in which 'organising activity' is at a high level, while the 'organisation' ceases to exist in the sense of a definable physical location. Amalgamation of these two formulations led to the identification of a 'mode of organising' or 'mode of conduct' across a variety of settings with greater or lesser degrees of establishment (in the conventional organisational sense). Taken together, the communalities found in the field work and in written accounts of similar settings provide the basis for the cultural context - both as a source of meanings, values and beliefs, and as the creation of active participants.

However, as the earlier discussion has shown, the connections made in this way are incomplete unless attention is also given to the environmental context - the nature of the specific arena in which participants seek to create and maintain a particular social organisation, and the manner in which that arena is modified by their activities. We may note that in the case of Women's Centres and similar organisations, some aspects of the environment are seen as different and oppositional, while others are seen as similar and sympathetic. (This characterisation does not, of course, preclude the possibility of changes in relationships over time.) Analytically, it is recognised that both the cultural and environmental contexts are processes with their own dynamics (cf. Pettigrew, 1985). In terms of the present research, however, it is not possible to examine these processes in great detail. In a large part, the focal level of analysis is that of the group and in many cases the environmental context will be 'seen' from that perspective. This limitation is not, however, without its own usefulness. It has already been pointed out that there is a shortage of available models for groups seeking to establish non-hierarchical organisations, and that therefore they are presented with a wide range of choices, both in terms of the social location of the group and the manner and extent to which they seek opportunities in and respond to the constraints of a particular social location. Moreover, an environmental context may act, through association, as a source of meaning and identity for the group which inhabits it. In a processual analysis it is possible to show how a group may seek to change or modify its identity through the process of modifying its social location. Attention to these processes provides a means of illustrating how a desired end-state may be perceived as incompatible with a particular environmental context, and the extent to which participants are able to exercise skill in attaining changes.

Therefore, while it is argued to be important to consider the environmental context as more than just a descriptive backdrop, in the main it will be presented as it is perceived and used by participants in the group.

Throughout, the emphasis here has been on the need for a connectable vertical and horizontal analysis. It is pertinent at this point to review the approach offered by Ranson et al (1980)(page 37) who suggest that the temporal perspective adopted by the researcher affects the 'visibility' of the different levels of the analysis. The research design is intended to make use of this insight by utilising the illuminatory power it offers to provide evidence of 'an order of meaning, value and belief' and of 'emergent regularities' (ibid, 1980:14) as components of a conceptual framework which informs the material presented in the two long case studies. This approach is further justified by attending to Weick's (1979:3) conceptualisation of organising as the process by which actors 'assemble ongoing inter-dependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes'. The means of making sensible - and therefore manageable - the complexity which exists in the world, are provided at two (analytically separable) levels. At the level of the cultural context, values are instrumental in providing simplification; 'so far as effective values emerge . . . a field is created which is no longer richly joined and turbulent but simplified and relatively static' (Emery and Trist, 1965:28). At the level of the environmental context a stabilising effect is obtained when some component of the structural configuration appears relatively fixed and acquires a taken-for-granted character. Given these parameters, the energy of organising is directed elsewhere - to areas where meaning is uncertain, where resources are inadequate, where behaviour in inappropriate. As Weick (1979:4) sees it:

> Organising is directed initially at any input that is not self-evident. Happenings that represent a change, a difference or a discontinuity from what has been going on, happenings that seem to have more than one meaning, are the occasion for sizeable collective activity. Once these inputs have become less equivocal, there is a decrease in the amount of collective activity directed at them.

Weick is right in observing the differential attention organising groups give to matters which do and do not (at various times) enter the arena which is subject to negotiation, but, in the case of innovatory groups, it is perhaps less easy to detect a ground-line of 'self-evident' happenings than he suggests. Returning again to our emphasis on the need for a processual and contextualised analysis, the question rather becomes one of tracing out how different expressions of the core values, as a mode of conduct, may or may not be seen as acceptable, and hence part of 'how things are done here' and, at the same time, how the relatively fixed components of structural configurations may or may not be seen as congruent with the attainment of core values, as a desired end-state, and hence may be taken for granted.

In this research the vertical components of the analysis are (i) the cultural context which is viewed from a broad perspective and reveals the existence of values which inform organising activity in the women's movement, (ii) the environmental context in which Women's Centres locate (this is shown to be composed of different segments, only some of which share the values of the women's movement), and (iii) the group - the participants in Women's Centres whose day-to-day interactions create a social organisation which makes reference to shared core values. It has already been noted that the limitations of this research do not permit a full exploration of the horizontal processes in the cultural and environmental contexts. However, we are able to provide additional background to the full processual analyses of the long case studies with three short case studies which precede them. In the short case studies the relatively static analyses

highlight the structural configurations of different Women's Centres as 'emergent regularities'. These case studies identify the fact that certain aspects of social order may be 'taken for granted' in the sense described above, and that, in these circumstances, organisational energy is directed to other parts of the social order. Bringing this insight to bear on the long case studies is useful in accounting for the way in which different arenas of negotiation occupy centre stage at different times.

In the long case studies we shall be primarily inquiring into the how of non-hierarchical organisation. The contention is that this form of organisation cannot be dismissed as 'natural' or 'spontaneous', but requires negotiation and the exercise of skill. In Chapter 3, where we look at a number of accounts of organising activity in the women's movement, some problem areas are identified and these provide a means of refining the original research questions (see pp 46, 55). A detailed account of the analytical strategy will be found in Chapter 5, Section IV. There we shall review the findings of Chapters 3 and 4, and describe the emergence of the analytical categories which are used to discuss the case study material. Chapter 8 discusses the case study material and there we shall show that

(i) values form an important component of organising processes in Women's Centres, and that the mode of conduct and movement towards a desired end state are subject to assessments of legitimacy; a positive aspect of non-hierarchical organisation is that it enables participants to engage in collective behaviour of a style which has intrinsic value for them;

(ii) creating and maintaining non-hierarchical organisation places demands on participants in terms of the acquisition and application of skills;

(iii) there are difficulties in retaining the commitment of

participants, and that these difficulties are a source of concern since there is a value requirement for open participation;

(iv) differences in influence between participants are hard to eradicate, particularly in situations where there are both paid and voluntary workers;

(v) interactions with the environment are multi-dimensional and are affected by perceptions of the degree of autonomy which exists, and by the ability to seek out opportunities and respond to threats.

We have not so far suggested how the success or failure of Women's Centres might be understood and we now outline our approach to assessment criteria. Obvious criteria of success and failure such as size or persistence have some relevance, but cannot be taken as the whole story. As Abrams and McCullough (1976) have noted in their research on communes it is necessary to ask persistence of what? It is also necessary to inquire into participants' own assessment criteria. This research does not attempt to engage with debates which are concerned to assess the success or failure of the women's movement in an entitative sense; the continuing debates in this area (e.g. Foley and Steedly, 1980, Goldstone, 1980) are indicative of the difficulties inherent in arriving at agreed definitions and criteria. Instead the focus is at the level of the group and its social organisation. Here, it is suggested, two different modes of identifying success criteria are discernible, one derived from the negotiation of differences between members and another based on the existence of communalities amongst members. This formulation is paralleled by Abrams and McCullough (1976:156) who observe that '(Communes) are successful or unsuccessful in relation to many different criteria which may often be seen to oppose one another and which are differently valued by different members of the group', and continue (ibid, 1976:161), 'we shall say that a commune is successful insofar as its members seem able

to negotiate their way towards a society of equals'. This distinction is interesting, but it is inappropriate to counterpose participants' and analysts' definitions. Rather, we should inquire into how participants construct a definition of success in terms of the achievement of a desired end-state and, in the shorter term, how the legitimacy of different strategic or tactical activities is an outcome of negotiative processes between members on the basis of different assessments of the current position and its relation to the direction to be pursued. Shorter term assessment criteria will then relate to the implementation of a particular tactic. Over time different tactics may be introduced in pursuit of the same end-state; their success will be understood in terms which are specific to that strategy or tactic, as well as in relation to a desired end-state. For example, assessing the success of a rota system of volunteers in a Women's Centre may be taken separately from assessing whether or not a rota system is intrinsic to the success of a Women's Centre. At another time the employment of paid workers may be subject to the same dual assessment. In sum, the construction of a sense of social order which is appropriate with respect to a set of core values, depends on contributions to that order being perceived as consistent with those values (Brown and Hosking, 1986), and, as Pettigrew (1985:46) has pointed out, '(A) political and cultural view of process gives a central place to the processes through which strategies and changes are legitimised and delegitimised'. This forms the basis of the research interest and of the approach adopted to it.

III. THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The data is presented in three sections. First, Chapter 3 provides a brief history of the women's movement and, through the examination of written accounts of organising activity within the

movement, identifies a cultural context characterised by a shared set of core values. Second, in Chapter 4 three short case studies, derived mainly from material gathered in interviews, but containing also a small component of participant observation, are presented. These illustrate some of the varieties of form - the different 'emergent regularities' - which are possible within the women's movement. Finally, two long case studies (Chapters 6 & 7) consist of full processual analyses. The data here arises from long-term participant observation, interview material and documentary evidence. The detailed account of the methodological procedures employed in this data collection is reserved for Chapter 5 since it directly pertains to the long case studies. By presenting the data in this way the intention is to permit complex situations to be understood both in their component parts and as entities. The insights derived from the first two data sections may then be carried forward to inform the long case-studies.

1. The Cultural Context

Chapter 3 looks at the early years of the women's movement in Britain and, in organisational terms, shows how the stance of the movement is simultaneously oppositional - to conventional modes of organising - and advocational - of something else. This 'something else' is broadly characterised as non-hierarchical organisation. Such a specification is paralleled in anarchist approaches to social order, but comparison with accounts written from a feminist perspective illustrates how anarchists have glossed over two important features of attempts to implement non-hierarchical organisation. First, the need for an ideology or rationality which motivates any such attempts by imbuing them with a value component, and second, the need to inquire into the precise nature of the strategies and tactics which may be

employed in the implementation of non-hierarchical organisation. Drawing on a wide range of anecdotal and reflexive accounts from the women's movement in Britain and elsewhere, the search is for communalities of experience and intention and for the identification of problem areas and proposed solutions. Questions which are raised here include: How is the pursuit of equality affected by variation in individual capabilities and how may these variations be minimised? Is it possible to ensure genuine equality of influence between members? What demands does non-hierarchical organising make on participants? How do individuals and groups manage different levels of commitment? How is the question of representativeness in 'open' groups understood? What are the effects of mixing paid workers and volunteers? How are relationships with the environment constructed, bearing in mind the sense of opposition inherent in movement groups? What are the advantages, both individual and collective, of non-hierarchical forms of organising? (By way of narrowing the focus of attention, the particular characteristics of Women's Centres are outlined in the preamble to Chapter 4.)

The broad survey of material in Chapter 3 is both fragmented and general. In its generalities it provides the long-term perspective from which assessments of order, meaning and myth may be inferred. In the fragments of individual and collective experiences, the dialectic quality of how it is and how it might be is evident. A feature of all the accounts gathered in this research - not only those available in written form - is their self-reflexive and analytical quality. This suggests that sense-making activity (see page 49) may commonly be more explicit in innovatory groups than in conventionally organised settings.

2. The Short Case Studies

In the three short case studies in Chapter 4 a change of perspective serves to highlight the structural arrangements of groups and to draw attention to some variations in relationships with the environmental context. That is to say, a sense of 'emergent regularities' is predominant. Here we are able to look at antecedent conditions, the contexts in which groups develop and the composition of groups. This will lead to an examination of the enabling and constraining features of different environmental contexts, whether the group's assessment of its purpose is relatively fixed or a matter for much debate, and what criteria are used to define membership. In addition, since one of the features which characterise Women's Centres as distinct from any social movement organisation is the requirement for a specific physical location, attention is paid to whether the provision of this requirement is easily achieved or demands considerable organising energy. In accounts of this type there can be little detail of the day-to-day interactions of group members. On the other hand, a view from this perspective illustrates with some clarity the manner in which the relative fixity of some aspect of a group's structural configuration has the effect of, largely, removing this aspect from the group's negotiative arena and, reciprocally, directing the political and organising energy of the group into other areas. Possible aspects which appear 'fixed' and act as dominant stabilities of the structural configuration may be, variously, unchallenged agreement about the membership of the group or about the purpose of the group, or the ability to assume that particular resources or sources of support will persist without the expenditure of effort by group members.

3. The Long Case Studies

In the long case studies the processual approach allows us to see different structural emphases as part of a continual flow, and hence to monitor any modifications by identifying particular constraining or facilitating factors and their variation over time, as well as the different influences brought to the process of organising by different participants. Moving closer to the day-to-day interaction processes of the group brings the individual members within it into closer focus. From this distance the simultaneous existence of qualitatively different perceptions of the organisation is evident, as Stewart (1978) has observed. In addition, the fact that very few members are paid for their involvement raised questions of commitment management in terms of a balance of resources and constraints for each individual participant (Gerson, 1976). Taken together the political negotiation of different perceptions and terms of commitment play a crucial part in determining the 'right' to make influential contributions to the production and maintenance of the organisation. The question of legitimate contributions is also closely tied to the demand for non-hierarchical organisation; here we must ask what latitude is acceptable and what responses are invoked by the perceived entrenchment of leadership roles.

In most cases Women's Centres place importance on the fact that they operate as open forums, responsive to the demands and receptive to the contributions of any women who chose to make them. In these terms the nature of boundary management is different from many organisations, the drive being towards permeability rather than security. Managing this openess imperative, however, produces its own problematic - how are the contributions of incomers to be weighted beside the contributions of long-term members with their accumulated experience, skills and familiarity with the cultural climate? The importance of

particular skills of organising - acquiring information, building relationships and influencing others, maintaining a balance between group solidarity and responsiveness to threats and opportunities (Brown and Hosking, 1986) - has pertinence for all organisations. The particular problem facing Women's Centres and similar organisations is to devise a way of accumulating and exercising these skills which is commensurate with the core values referential to such an endeavour; in other words, in a way which is perceived as legitimate.

This section has detailed the research interests and problematics which pertain to an investigation of non-hierarchical organising within the women's movement. The long case studies are informed by what has gone before, but the intention is to add to this content by giving due space to the 'repetitive action' (Westerlund and Sjöstrand, 1979:24) which is not visible in point-in-time studies, to as many perspectives and over as long a time as possible (Pettigrew, 1985).

CHAPTER 3

The Cultural Context

CHAPTER THREE: THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

> The Rape Crisis Centre organises along feminist lines. We are non-hierarchical - that is, we don't have an executive committee or elect officers, as these functions are shared among members . . . The tasks arising out of business meetings (are) undertaken by a member or members volunteering to carry them out . . . We also try to pay as much attention to the form and process of our meetings and interactions as we do to the content, trying all the time to be aware of each others' feelings, ensuring that all women are involved in decision making, and the tasks of the group. Often, those more used to formal structures and hierarchical organisations will query whether feminists principles are compatible with getting things done - but we can say to them that we managed to set up a rape crisis service after only a few months of work.
>
> (Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre Collective, 1982:176)

The organisations which have been studied in this research are all, to a greater or lesser extent, self-consciously feminist. That is, the fact that they are women-only has more meaning than situations where such an arrangement arises circumstantially or fortuitously, (see, for example, Wajcman, 1983), and some sense of affiliation with the women's movement is involved. (We thus exclude organisations such as the Towns Women's Guilds.) Fundamental to this distinction is the reference to a system of values. This section will briefly outline the development of the autonomous women's movement and offer evidence for the existence of these values in terms of the movement's view of organising. The problems which arise in the implementation of these values, and the various strategies which are adopted to manage these problems are discussed in Section II. The problems which are found to occur with some frequency are characterised as (1) <u>dimensions of inequality</u>, which is discussed under (a) abilities, (b) influence, and (c) time and commitment, and (2) <u>environmental problems</u>. Part (1) provides some instances of the strategies which participants may adopt

in the attempt to redress perceived inequalities in each of the three areas, and observes that the negotiative processes involved make demands on participants and may require long-term attention. Under (2) we note the difficulties non-hierarchical groups may experience in interacting with an hierarchically organised environment, and conclude that such groups do not experience 'the environment' as unidimensional, but as made up of intra- and extra-movement components. Section III examines the positive side of non-hierarchical organisation and sees both organisational and ideological advantages. Examples are given of how this form of organisation may be flexible and creative, engender more committed participation and provide the support for individual and collective risk-taking.

It will be shown in this section that, while many similarities exist between feminist practices in organising and social anarchism in the sense of a struggle against hierarchy, differences occur in the extent to which the values informing this struggle are explicated. What is distinctive about the autonomous women's movement is an explicit statement of shared values. Anarchist writers are, in the main, content to rest their case by citing evidence for the existence of a 'natural order'. Feminism goes further than this; indeed it would not claim that the order it seeks to implement is in any way 'natural', but rather recognises the overarching importance of an informing ideology. This ideology provides a motivating rationale for the espousal of values for such qualities as cooperation and equality, which are elsewhere (e.g. Horowitz (1964:596), Ward (1982:28)) identified as attributes of 'natural' or 'spontaneous' order. In addition, feminist writers are concerned to draw attention to the interconnectedness of specificities and generalities in social life, a viewpoint which is encapsulated in the widely adopted slogan, 'the personal is political'. The implication this has for organising

activity within feminism is that as much emphasis is placed on ensuring that means or present-time processes are enacted in accordance with the informing ideology, as is given to depicting an end state which embodies full expression of these values. The two are theoretically identical.

The quotation at the beginning of this section is typical of statements made by individual women's groups. The definition of the women's movement given by Spare Rib (1985) shows that the concept of the autonomous group is one which is of central importance to the movement.

> The women's liberation movement in Britain is made up of many groups and campaigns. It has no head office, chairwoman or paid-up members, but it does have seven demands, agreed at several national conferences. "The women's liberation movement asserts a woman's right to define her own sexuality and demands:
>
> 1) Equal pay for equal work;
> 2) Equal education and job opportunities;
> 3) Free contraception and abortion on demand;
> 4) Free 24 hour community controlled childcare;
> 5) Legal and financial independence for women;
> 6) An end to discrimination against lesbians;
> 7) Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence. An end to the laws, assumptions and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women."

In addition to the specific political agenda of the women's movement, it is the widespread agreement on organisational processes and structures as an expression of a value system which provides the general loose-knit uniformity of the movement identified by Coote and Campbell (1982:35). Describing the dissolution of the National Coordinating Committee in 1971, they say:

> Most women were confident that the movement would hang together without a coordinating committee - and it has remained a loose federation of small groups, linked chiefly by a sense of involvement and a common cause. That it has survived for more than a decade is a measure of the strength of the idea that has held it together. It is also due to the fact that the

> movement's lack of formal structure has been a positive, not a negative feature.
>
> (emphasis in original)

This dissolution of the National Coordinating Committee took place in response to the realisation that it had become a sectarian battle-ground between various groups on the left. The first two National Conferences had admitted men, and had been seen by some participants as being as much concerned with class issues as with women's issues. However, a number of unpleasant incidents called this into question, and by 1973, when the women's liberation workshop was opened in London, a series of meetings decided that men should be excluded from it. 'What (the majority of feminists) wanted above all was <u>autonomy</u>.' (Coote and Campbell, 1982:35, emphasis in original). From now on the women's movement was strictly women only. The separation from the broad sweep of left politics which followed this decision meant more, however, than the exclusion of men as individuals. It also rejected forms of organising which were defined as 'male'. In particular, rejection of hierarchical forms and of leaders was seen as vital in defining the <u>difference</u> of the women's movement. The three quotations which follow are representative of a much larger number. The repetition is intended to establish the very widespread agreement which exists in this area.

> To me feminism is about caring, sharing, cooperation, equality and life. In addition it is about change as you can't achieve these things externally without internalising those values first. . . . The way in which we work together is all-important, for the means are as vital as the ends. How can you work for a feminist community in a violent or hierarchical manner?
>
> (West, 1984:124)

> We were opposed to all forms of leaderism, and struggled for equality in all our social relationships. Many of these ideas on the form and nature of political activity and organisation can be illustrated by some of the things which the women's movement initiated in Islington in the early seventies. In 1972 a group of women opened the first local Women's Centre in York

> Way. The idea of having a Centre was in itself different from the way in which most of the left organised.
>
> (Segal, 1979:167)

> The women's groups or projects which have been the most successful are those which experimented with various fluid structures: the rotation of tasks and chairpersons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolised decision making, and time slots for discussion of group dynamics.
>
> (Kornegger, 1979:242)

Taken together these quotations provide evidence that there is a broad agreement about the desirability of a particular form of organising within the women's movement. That is, one which is non-hierarchical; which values equality between participants and attempts to achieve this through sharing tasks, skills, information and resources, and rejecting the monopolisation of organising activity by a minority of participants. We may note that Segal instances the setting up of a Women's Centre as an expression of these organising values, but also that such an implementation involves 'struggle'. This point will be developed in the discussion of the case studies. West points out that the internalisation of values must go hand in hand with their external expression, and congruence of means and ends is essential. Kornegger makes it clear that the enactment of the organising values involves innovation and experiment, and will result in a fluidity of structure. It is interesting that, although the criteria for her assertion are not made explicit, a connection is made between non-hierarchical organising and 'success'.

The views expressed above have many parallels in anarchist writing. The emphasis on equality, cooperation and the devolution of power is widely stated (e.g. Wieck, 1979, Walter, 1979, Taylor, 1982). However, there are also a number of differences to which attention will be drawn. First, the use of 'man' as a generic is so total as to confirm the '"invisible" status of women' (Daniels, 1975:368). An

examination of the anarchist weekly 'Freedom' (selected articles 1951-60) shows that the references to women are confined to discussions of contraception. In this anarchist writers are subject to the same accusations of sexism as other political groups. Second, the reasons given for adopting an anarchist form of organisation are not those of the women's movement where it is seen as an active and necessary counter to patriarchy; a positive political act in the present. By contrast Horowitz's assessment is that, 'Anarchism is in effect a description of historical tensions more than a theory for the overcoming of these tensions' (1964:596). Anarchism does not attempt, as feminism does (see page 61), a 'unified description (. . .) of public life and private problems' (ibid,1964:596) and thus, in Horowitz's view, fails to provide a connection between immediate political goals and a desired end state of existence. Horowitz also makes the third point (and illustrates the first), 'Man is always, if given the opportunity, a good fellow . . . left in his natural state, man is cooperative' (1964:596). Notwithstanding the slightly ironic tone, the 'natural state' of birds, animals, children and 'primitives' has been widely cited as evidence for the anarchist idea, from Kropotkin (1904) onwards, and still has currency (Taylor, 1982:167). The assumption here is that a naturally cooperative social order is available to be uncovered if the layers of authority structures which conceal it can, by some means, be stripped away. There is no reference to a need for individuals to consciously adopt values which may produce this social order; they are assumed to be innate. It follows that little attention is given to the production of social order. 'Communitarian anarchist writers . . . have not recognised that there would be a social order problem <u>within</u> the small community' (Taylor, 1982:167, emphasis in original). Ward's description of the 'theory of spontaneous order':

> the theory that, given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation.
>
> (1973:28)

gives no indication of how this order might be achieved (c.f. page 64).

The foregoing examination of differences is not to say that the similarities between feminism and anarchism have not been identified. A number of groups and individual writers, notably Peggy Kornegger, Carol Ehrlich and Cathy Levine, have made the connections clear. In Britain a newsletter, 'Anarchist Feminist', was produced between 1977 and 1980. This newsletter contained a number of articles which discussed the question of organisation within the women's movement (e.g. Vere, 1977, Huyton, 1977). While these writers insist on the fundamental need to pursue a non-hierarchical form of organisation, they also, unlike the anarchist writers referred to above, recognise that there are difficulties in doing so. As Vere (1977) remarks, 'We have very few models to work on'. It is evident from the field work data and from other sources that attempts to implement non-hierarchical forms of organisation are frequently problematic and can be conflictual. Two responses to conflict within the women's movement are to be found in the literature; on the one hand a move towards a national delegate structure is advocated (e.g. Freeman, 1984) as an answer to the perceived problems, on the other, such a move is seen as a potential danger to be resisted (e.g. Laws, 1980). Laws (1980:4) describes the last national conference in Birmingham in 1978 as, 'so antagonistic, so unsisterly, that no one has offered to do another one'. She continues, 'there have been various calls for delegate structures and so on since then . . . and I am afraid that there will be a strong push for authoritarian structures to be set up'. This fear has proved unfounded. In 1986 it appears less likely than ever that the women's movement would be containable within a national structure, nor is the need for one being expressed.

'Anarchist Feminist' ceased publication in 1980. A page in the last edition entitled, 'Sexism cornered in the anarchist press' suggests why. Nevertheless, in terms of organisation, the connections between feminism and anarchism are still clear. One outside observer (Bouchier, 1983:218) made this assessment:

> (The women's movement) has sustained a co-operative, entirely decentralised and leaderless structure which approximates closely to the highest ideals of social anarchism: namely that people can work together for common goals without the need for a coercive, bureaucratic hierarchy to drive them on. It is an ideal which has been and still is held by many social movements, but which has never been made to work so long and so effectively.

To summarise: There are similarities between anarchist and feminist approaches to organising activity. However, feminism develops the anarchist idea by relating this idea to a number of political demands and to the means of their achievement. This is done by reference to a system of values, namely participation by all, the sharing of tasks and skills and a conscious rejection of hierarchical forms. These values are shown to have widespread acceptance.

II. IDENTIFICATION OF PROBLEMS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VALUES

> Today there is a new Women's Centre in Islington, but there is little continuity between our old one and the new one . . . Those feminists who were active in Essex Road have not become involved with the new centre, most of them saying, 'Oh, no, not the same problems all over again'.
>
> (Segal, 1979:160)

As has already been suggested the process of negotiating a social order with reference to the values outlined above is not necessarily problem-free. To put it simply, the espousal of a value for equality does not, <u>in itself</u>, ensure that equality will prevail. This section will draw on accounts of organising activity within the women's movement to identify commonly encountered problems and will illustrate our argument that the production and reproduction of non-

hierarchical organisation is not 'natural', but is negotiated. Since the quantity of written material which refers directly to Women's Centres is extremely limited, use will also be made of accounts of activities which show some similar characteristics. Reference will also be made to more theoretical work which is informed by such activities.

1. Dimensions of Inequality

a) Abilities

It is taken as self-evident that individuals are not equal in their abilities. In collectivist organisations these differences may inhibit the enactment of a value for equality. Attempts to minimise individual differences may be directed towards almost any personal attributes, but it is particularly the area of skill and knowledge differentials which is seen as crucial. The tactics of skill sharing and task rotation are widely advocated as a counter to this (e.g. Coote and Campbell, 1982:36, Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981:63). However, the following extracts from first-hand accounts of attempts to put these tactics into practice illustrate the kinds of difficulties which may arise. For example, it may not be recognised that some tasks are too demanding for some participants, as in Charlton's account of a Children's Community Centre.

> By the summer we were aware of a few problems. Some parents who worked at the Centre, especially but not exclusively those without teaching experience, felt and were ill equipped to cope with the work. It had been naive of us to expect anything different.
>
> (Charlton, 1977:36)

Or the problem may be recognised but the 'remedial' action taken by the other participants is inadequate, as in Finch's account of a women's health group.

> Some members have been women who . . . have a genuine desire to help others in a similar situation. But

> other women joined because they themselves needed help. Where this was the overriding factor the woman has left. Those women experienced tremendous difficulty with the advice giving function. Some were seen as unreliable and 'in need of help', though members offered what support they could.
>
> (Finch, 1982:138)

Thus, the recognition of differences in abilities also places demands on those who are in the advantageous position. These demands are in terms of the time and effort which is required from them to make effective reductions in ability differentials. The extent to which effort is expended in this direction is likely to depend on the extent to which the value for equality is held. One group's account of producing a newsletter (W.I.R.E.S., 1978:19) gives a good indication of the kinds of processes involved. The time period covered is 2½ years.

> Collective working was a positive experience . . . but there were problems. At the beginning 'leadership' was supposedly non-existent. Everyone was expected to do everything <u>immediately</u>, answer letters, file, type, duplicate . . . it was pretty chactic and not everyone could cope. Sometimes we were expecting far too much of people. It's a question of working out when someone is ready to take something on, and then encouraging them to do it.
>
> Sharing skills wasn't always smooth and easy. We had to learn to criticise each other's work constructively, not moan behind backs or secretly correct errors when the person who'd made the mistake had left for the day. Old-timers had to face their responsibility to teach newcomers, something we all found hard at first as it seemed like giving orders. As time went on some women did necessarily specialise; we only had one woman doing the accounts at one time. Other specialisations weren't so necessary and change involved the specialist letting go her hold and communicating her skill and the others having confidence in their abilities and the willingness to learn. <u>In the end</u>, the necessity to do things made us all able to do them.
>
> (emphasis added)

What is striking here is the amount of learning activity which is not simply directed towards the learning of tasks. Those who are initially skilled are required to learn as much as those who are less skilled. We may note the need to learn to <u>pace</u> the sharing process

appropriately, to make criticism overt but to label it in such a way that it is not construed as personal attack, and to give instruction without giving orders. This group also found that temporary specialisms - 'one woman doing the accounts at onetime' - were organisationally useful, and were acceptable within the general ethos of equality as long as they were defined as temporary. Other groups deal less successfully than this group with the problem of translating values into action. Members of the Women's Liberation Bookbus (1980) said, 'We have always tried to share out tasks equally . . . (but) for a long time one woman did most of the accounts. We all talked a lot about how guilty we felt that we didn't share that work with her, but we let her do most of it just the same'. Implementation of a value for equality through the process of minimising differentiation places demands on all participants. It is not sufficient to recognise that there is some moral imperative to do so; a process of internal education is also necessary for which time must be allocated. Rothschild-Whitt (1982:36) summarises these observations:

> Minimising differentiation is difficult and time-consuming . . . The time and priority typically devoted to internal education makes sense only if it is understood as part of a struggle against the division of labor.

b) Influence

Within collectivist organisations all members have the right to full and equal participation in the formulation of problems and the negotiation of solutions. The question of equality of influence in these processes is far less straight forward, and is seen by many observers as the most prevalent and persistent problem area. Rothschild-Whitt (1982:44,45) considers this a quasi-inevitable limit to what may be achieved in the pursuit of equality.

> Inequalities in influence persist in the most egalitarian of organisations . . . such individual

> differences may constrain the organisation's ability to realise its egalitarian ideals. The task of any collectivist-democratic workplace . . . is to eliminate all bases of individual power and authority save those that individuals carry in their person.

Rothschild-Whitt's approach removes the issue of inequalities of influence based on personal attributes such as verbal fluency or social skills to an arena where negotiation is not possible. She does not suggest that the group may seek to employ tactics which aim to reduce such inequalities. Mansbridge (1973:361) makes a similar distinction between types of inequalities but fails to come to the same conclusion.

> Each individual brings to the group different levels of expertise, personal attractiveness, verbal skill, self-confidence, access to information and interest in the task. Therefore each group must (a) reduce inequalities that can be reduced, and (b) understand and find ways to deal with inequalities than cannot be reduced.

Thus, it is her contention that it is possible to find ways of 'dealing with' even irreducible inequalities. For example, the importance attached to achieving consensus in decision making through discussion places a high premium on verbal skills. But again, behaviours can be learnt which reduce the <u>effects</u> of differences in this area.

> The less verbally facile can be assured that the group . . . is willing to put up with stumbling or help them with long-windedness, and most important, actually listens to and understands what they are saying . . . The more potentially influential can themselves curb their impulses to speak or to try to influence the group.
>
> Mansbridge (1973:363,367)

Mansbridge concludes that even the adoption of such minimising tactics may not be sufficient to result in a genuine equality of influence, but that they can be successfully used to produce an equality of <u>respect</u> which 'is more important to most people'. (ibid, 1973:367).

No such possibility exists for Freeman (1984) who is unswervingly critical of 'the tyranny of structurelessness' in the women's movement. (This article first appeared in 1970, but

references are to the 1984 reprint.) She argues that while the 'myth of structurelessness' prevails there are no mechanisms which can prevent the emergence of elites and 'stars', and consequently no checks on the increase of differentials of influence. Her assertion is that:

> Informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large . . . there can be no attempts to put limits on the use of power . . . (and) they cannot be directly influenced by the group.
>
> (ibid, 1984:9)

The solution Freeman proposes to this difficulty is that rules and structures must become formalised, but her appeal to formal rationality is, as Rothschild-Whitt (1982:26) notes, directly counter to the substantive rationality of collectivist democratic organisations. Under substantive rationality, 'only decisions which appear to carry the consensus of the group behind them, carry the weight of moral authority . . . Authority . . . resides in the collective as a whole' (ibid, 1982:26,27). The fact that Freeman fails to identify a value for equality in the culture of the women's movement prevents her appreciating that the elitist behaviours she identifies may be unacceptable at the level of the group, and may be addressed at that level (e.g. Levine, 1984:22). Both Mansbridge (1973) and Col (1981) take this point to comment on the work of Michels (1949). Col (1981: 192) notes that the tendency to develop hierarchical structures is in direct conflict with the value of equality espoused by most women's groups, while Mansbridge (1973:354) states simply that, 'participatory groups may be the only answer to Michels' iron law of oligarchy'.

As with differentials in ability, differentials in influence based on personal attributes may be handled by a group to the extent that participants are willing to engage in a learning process. Levine (1984:22) suggests some of the possibilities:

> The small . . . group learns, first to recognise stylistic differences, and then to appreciate and work with them; rather than trying to either ignore or

> annihilate differences in personal style, the small group learns to appreciate and use them . . . we are not going to obliterate personal-styles-as-power, except by constant recognition of these differences, and by learning to let differences of personal style exist together.

c) Time and commitment

Participation in a collectivist organisation depends heavily on two-way communication; to be part of the process an individual's physical presence is normally required, and in some cases it is also sufficient. For example, Cox (1981:190) observes, 'In the Albany Women's Forum, whoever comes to the steering committee at any meeting is considered a member for that meeting'. The converse is also true; those who do not attend will have less influence on the proceedings, and possibly they may have none. While this issue obviously has some bearing on the processes in 'closed' or work-place groups, it has much greater salience in 'open' groups such as the Albany Women's Forum and Women's Centres. In closed groups absent individuals are known and, if required, their views may be canvassed, whereas in open groups those with the time and inclination to attend meetings may acquire a false representativeness of the group as a whole. Even when this problem is noted it may prove hard to resolve, as Charlton observes in her account of the Children's Community Centre.

> The meetings were quite well attended, but always by the same people, basically those who worked on the rota. Try as we did we could not involve the others.
>
> Charlton (1977:74)

Charlton reports that most of the non-attenders were in full-time employment. The meetings were held at a time when they were most likely to be available - Sunday afternoons - but the level of commitment (a willingness to reallocate personal resources in a particular direction) was inadequate to bring about their attendance. In other instances the limits of commitment may be collectively

recognised and collectively managed, as in Riley's account of a Women's Employment group.

> Women in the group . . . feel that there is a limit to the amount of time and energy they are prepared to devote to fundraising and we have, therefore, always put a time limit when decisions will be made in the light of the situation at that time. I think that may be a reflection of the fact that for all of us in the group our lives are a precarious balance of job, children, other responsibility, commitments to other organisations, etc., and additional involvements have to be weighed very carefully.
>
> (Riley, 1982:46)

We may note that there appears to be relative parity in the situations of members of this group, and that there was already some experience in 'balancing' commitments. In this case the likelihood of arriving at a consensus of an acceptable level of commitment to this group is increased.

However, in open groups, of which Women's Centres are an example, this adaptation appears relatively rare. The 1981 conference on Women's Centres observed that collectives do not always work well in practice, as individuals are not bound to turn up to meetings. In some Centres this problem is overcome by the instigation of a co-ordinating group, but this in turn raises the problem of the 'representativeness' of such a group. Many Centres expressed concern at their failure to involve 'local' or working class women and a number of ramifications of this problem area will be illustrated by the case studies. Segal's account of the Essex Road Centre (1979:176) points to the general problem of initiating and maintaining commitment.

> Despite all of the creativity and energy which originated from the Women's Centre, it was always hard to keep it open for more than a few hours a week . . . and many women were only active in the Centre for about a year, and would then drift off. It was often hard to get the new women who came along involved in the Centre, and it was difficult to keep up good communication between the different groups who did meet there.

Involving newcomers, maintaining the involvement of the already active

and co-ordinating the activities of various groups using the Centre are areas which require constant organisational attention. A recognition of the limits of voluntarism leads some groups to seek funding with which to 'buy' a quantity of commitment in the form of one or more paid workers. At Essex Road this proposal was considered, but rejected because of its possible implications.

> Some of us wanted to obtain money for a paid worker at the Centre in order to keep it open to co-ordinate and plan activities. But others rejected such an idea out of hand, believing it would be 'selling out' to obtain money from the local council or the state . . . Women also feared that a paid worker would create a hierarchical structure . . . There seemed a contradiction between our emphasis on self-help and collective activity and the idea of state funding.
>
> (Segal, 1979:176)

Other groups do not see the problem in the same terms, and accept that without paid workers they are unlikely to be able to implement their project. Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre is a case in point. However, even here the group found they had to deal with some unanticipated consequences of their actions.

> The presence of paid workers in the group created a whole new set of problems. The meetings subtly changed; sub-groups tended to fold up and energy seemed to evaporate . . . This is a serious problem for any organisation employing paid workers. The group is no longer working collectively towards a common goal; a division developed between volunteers and paid workers - a division with possible sources of resentment on both sides. This still is, to an extent, the case . . . work tends to be left to the paid workers, which seems fair enough as they are being paid. The workers can often feel, however, that other women have little interest in the day-to-day running of the organisation, and that without this interest, the full responsibility for important decisions is being left to them - but then how could the members give that much time? . . . With the best will in the world, when a person's unemployed it's not easy for them to work with people who are being paid for their time. Unless steps are taken to intervene in the process, the people who started the project in the first place, the collective, can feel left out as information and experience accumulates in the hands of the paid workers.
>
> (Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre Collective, 1982:177)

In this case the intervention strategy adopted was for each paid worker to choose a personal support worker from the members of the collective. The group reports that this system appears to be working, 'but no doubt we will come up with other ways of tackling the contradictions we've had to deal with ever since we became employers of paid labour' (ibid, 1982:178).

Participatory groups who cannot assume adequate or persistent commitment on the part of their members - as, for example, where members are not paid, or where an open policy makes it unclear who members are - must devise some means of dealing with a possible shortfall in commitment. This may be done by attempting to find ways of increasing the commitment level of volunteers, or by paying some members for their expenditure of time and effort. In the latter case, to the extent that a value for equality is seen to be threatened, innovations directed towards minimising differentiation may be introduced.

2. Environmental Problems

Rothschild-Whitt (1982:44) has pointed out that collectivist-democratic organisations may face particular problems when they are operating in a capitalist-bureaucratic context. The extent of the problem will depend on how much and in what way a group organising along non-hierarchical principles interacts with an hierarchically organised environment. For example, if a group is receiving funding from a state body it may be required to justify its activities in terms of 'outsider' criteria of cost-effectiveness. At the 1981 conference on Women's Centres a number of groups reported that they were 'checked up' on frequently, and one group said that they were required to account for the minutes of their meetings. This kind of pressure from the environment can lead to a group working with two

versions of 'reality'; one for internal use based on substantive rationality, and another for external use based on formal rationality. Rothschild-Whitt (1982:42) has termed this phenomenon 'cultural disjuncture', and also notes that, 'in part, the low wages, hard work and intense personal involvement that make collectivist organisations seem so costly may be due to costs imposed by the environment' (ibid, 1982:49). These costs may be in terms of the additional requirements of time and effort to produce an acceptable face to funding bodies, or other controllers of resources or, if such an approach is not adopted, on a limitation of the activities which are possible in an under-resourced situation. These problems may be mitigated to the extent that a participatory group is able to locate in a network of similarly organised groups which also have control of resources, such as the Mondragon system (Bradley and Gelb, 1981), but such examples are rare. It is more usual for groups to exercise some choice as to whether they locate in a position which offers strong support for their collectivist principles or in one which affords good access to resources. (Or, of course, in a number of interim positions if these are available.) In the women's movement some groups choose to operate in an entirely 'within movement' space. For others, and Women's Centres are an example here, the decision to acquire premises and funding makes inevitable some interaction with a hierarchically organised environment. We shall see in the case studies that groups may acquire, or seek to acquire, different social locations at different times.

However, the process of achieving a location in a particular part of social space is one which is subject to negotiation. We may instance two arenas in which negotiation commonly takes place. That is, internally where the group seeks to decide where it <u>wishes</u> to be located, and externally, where it seeks to achieve that location.

Riley (1982:46) makes a general observation about one difficulty groups can face in achieving their desired social location, and also comments on the limits of voluntarism (see 1 (c)).

> The timescale of gaining support from a funding organisation and then that organisation incorporating the finance required into its budgets is getting longer and means that any community group that wants to get funds to employ its own worker or acquire premises is likely to have to sustain itself over years rather than months and may still not be successful. Such projects are likely to become unviable.

This group also considered that it spent insufficient time locating itself in a network from which it could have gained support:

> We cut out (a) desirable phase - making relationships with other relevant projects (women's groups, trades councils, employers' organisations). This omission was not as serious in Milton Keynes as it might have been elsewhere. Such bodies are not exactly thick on the ground.
>
> (Riley, 1982:44)

Particularly for a newly constituted group, but also as part of a continuing process, the question of where to locate in social space is likely to require attention. After two months of operation Sheffield Women's Centre noted:

> There are still lots of questions, like who is the Centre for? - the community? or is it a place where women in the movement can go to explore their ideas/ feelings? We are starting to have open monthly meetings soon and hope to resolve who we want to attract to the Centre.
>
> (Sheffield Women's Centre, 1976)

The three extracts above give some indication of a further complication in the area of organisation-environment relations. If we set aside the extreme cases where a movement organisation locates wholly within a collectively organised environment or a bureaucratic organisation locates wholly within a bureaucratically organised environment, we are left with a number of 'mixed' cases where the organisation forms different relationships with different segments of the environment. Taking the instances above we may identify four areas where movement organisations may form relationships with the environment.

(i) with those whose values accord with the movement organisation and are potential participants e.g. women in the women's movement;

(ii) with those whose values are not known, and are potential participants e.g. women in the community;

(iii) with those whose values accord with the movement organisation, but are not seen as potential participants e.g. trades councils, some local authorities;

(iv) with those whose values do not accord with the movement organisation and are not seen as potential participants e.g. some funding agencies, some local authorities.

In summary form (i) and (ii) are referred to as the intra-movement environment, (iii) and (iv) as the extra-movement environment.

In general, forming relationships with the environment places heavy demands on participants, 'it is asking, in effect, that people in collectivist organisations constantly shift gears, that they learn to act one way inside their collectives and another way outside' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1982:41,42). Or possibly, as the instances above have shown, in a number of different ways.

III. THE POSITIVE SIDE OF NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANISATION

> Once one has belonged to a good participatory group it is hard to return to conventional, hierarchical decision making.
>
> (Mansbridge, 1973:367)

So far, an indication has been given of some of the problems which may arise in the attempt to implement a value for equality in a participatory democracy. Before moving on to examine these issues in the greater detail and complexity of the empirical data it is appropriate to look at the positive aspects of this mode of organising. In effect, why bother?

The short answer is provided by Charlton (1977:33) in her account of the setting up of the Children's Community Centre.

> Collective organising in this situation was a practical necessity as well as an ideal. We, the original organisers, the paid workers and new parents were collectively responsible for the success and running of the Centre. A situation had to be established where all had equal rights and took responsibility by choice, not by force of authority.

In general, the importance of control over work and organisational processes is widely considered to be a central reason for engaging in collectivist organisations (e.g. Cadman et al. 1981, Rothschild-Whitt, 1982). The congruence between work processes and ideals is productive of a situation where work is purposeful to the participants and, typically, is contrasted with a more alienated appraisal of work under a bureaucratic system, as in this statement by Onlywomen Press.

> In commercial publishing the process is incredibly split up from place to place. Here we are trying to pull the whole thing into a more integrated activity altogether. It's out of a feeling that we need control over our lives.
>
> (Cadman et al. 1981:33)

In more specific organisational terms a number of claims are made for the advantages of participatory groups. Mansbridge (1973: 352,353) has reviewed some of the relevant literature, and on that basis is able to list the following claims:

(i) fast, flexible, adaptive and accurate responses to a given situation are more likely;

(ii) more innovative and 'creative' results are produced;

(iii) an individual's commitment to decisions is increased;

(iv) more personal and organisational risks are taken;

(v) individuals develop a 'sense of mastery' or personal autonomy which is transferable to other settings.

We may examine each of these advantages in the light of accounts of organising activity in the women's movement. The first claim appears, initially, at odds with the more general observation that 'democracy

takes time', but Rothschild-Whitt (1982:39) has observed that with practice groups can learn to speed this process up, and this is endorsed by a women's group producing a newsletter.

> We never found difficulty . . . in meeting deadlines or making quick decisions. When an unexpected situation arose, such as being asked for information by a newspaper in a hurry, we'd promise to call them back in a few hours . . . That day's workers would discuss it, reach a possible solution and then contact everyone they could in the time, for their opinions.
>
> (W.I.R.E.S., 1978:19)

Flexibility and adaptiveness are seen by Col (1981:193) to be characteristic of the way in which groups (in her terms, networks) are formed in response to the needs of members and 'self-destruct' when they are no longer useful. 'This 'life-cycle' encourages the long-term expectation that whatever the need, some network will emerge to handle the issues.' Networks are, therefore, not maintained for their own sake, but only to the extent that they are useful. (The claim for accuracy, in extra-laboratory settings, is difficult to evidence; in the real world 'correct' responses rarely present themselves incontravertibly.)

The clearest examples of innovation and creativity in recent years are shown in the tactics of women at Greenham Common peace camp - tactics which have appeared to surprise journalists and other observers.

> One day some of the women began weaving webs of wool on the perimeter fence to remind those inside of their presence; since then, webs have been used to entangle machinery, to string supine protesters together, and to baffle police officers trained to make baton charges but not to unpick knitting.
>
> (Davenport, The Observer, 12 Dec., 1982:13)

> Without being told what to do, women on all sides of the base began doing the same things, making the same decorations, singing the same improvised songs, improvising with flair and imagination . . . it was a powerful advertisement for anarchy. It also seemed to be saying as much about women's creativity and potential for action beyond the home, as it was about the Bomb.
>
> (Gott, The Guardian, 15 Dec, 1982)

From the point of view of the women in the camp innovative responses also make organisational sense in terms of flexibility and speed, as this interview with one member shows.

> 'How do you organise yourselves here?' I asked, 'Who makes decisions? How does it run?' 'Chaotically', Helen said, 'and I think that's our greatest strength in a daft way, we never seem to know what we're doing from day to day, which makes it hard for the authorities to know either. The chaos comes from people coming and going. No one sits down and makes rigid plans, which is excellent or you'd be stuck if something happened fast.'
>
> (Jones, 1983:82)

We have already noted that decision making in collectivist organisations involves a consensus process. It is the nature of this process which allows the claim that an individual's commitment to decisions is increased. One experienced group gave this account of the procedure they adopt.

> We take turns to facilitate. This means preparing an agenda, seeing that we stick to the point in discussions, are working reasonably efficiently, and that everyone gets a chance to contribute. It's an easy job in our group, for everyone is aware of these things, so the facilitator just has to be a bit more aware, to notice the time, to sense we are reaching a decision. We reach decisions by consensus. If we cannot reach a decision it is usually because we are all unsure, rather than because different women hold irreconcilable views. We usually approach decisions by general discussion, and then let each woman say what she thinks to see if there is a general agreement. If one woman disagrees with a generally held view, then we try to see if any accomodation can be made to satisfy her as well. We will postpone a decision to another meeting if the discussion goes on a long time without getting anywhere.
>
> (Kanter et al, 1984:25)

This group took care to ensure that all participants were actively engaged in the process, and was able to recognise that there were occasions when it was inappropriate to 'force' a consensus. A statement from another group highlights the fact that the affective nature of the group is strengthened in the process, and that it can be a particularly effective form of decision making.

> Through consensus, we are working not only to achieve better solutions, but also to promote the growth of community and trust. . . . Consensus does not mean that everyone thinks the decision made is necessarily the best one possible, or even that all are sure it will work. What it does mean is that in coming to that decision, no one felt that her/his position on the matter was misunderstood or that it wasn't given a proper hearing. Hopefully, everyone will think it is the best decision; this often happens because when it works, collective intelligence does come up with better solutions than could individuals.
>
> (Jones, 1983:136,137)

This process is very likely to increase an individual's commitment to a decision; the overt and explicit synthesis of views involves the participant in an understanding of the problem - the reasons why a decision is taken - in a way which is not possible when decisions are simply 'received'.

One area where successful organisational risks have been taken is that of feminist publishing, to the extent that this is one of the few examples of growth in an otherwise static market. Two kinds of risk-taking are apparent; starting with insufficient capital, and believing, with only flimsy evidence, that a market exists for the product. One group which took the plunge said:

> We talked and decided that we could basically do two things: we could either set ourselves a time limit and get money together and all that, or we could literally just plunge in. It's a belief that women <u>can</u> do it. We've been told for so long that we can't, it means capital and so on.
>
> (Cadman <u>et al</u>. 1981:38, emphasis in original)

Another group, who were initially associated with a mainstream publisher but who later became independent, were able to benefit from their independence.

> What we discovered when we were at Quartet was that they did not understand . . . that what we do is special. It would be fair to say that many of the books that Quartet would not take on, because they thought they were not viable, became very successful. They did not see the audience.
>
> (Cadman <u>et al</u>. 1981:30)

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Finally, as a comment on personal risk-taking and the development of autonomy, we have the later experiences of the group producing the newsletter. For them, the experience of working in that group had subsequent applicability.

> Most of us now have jobs which before we would not have had the confidence to apply for. Three of us have written a book about women. We say what we think at work, where once we might have been frightened of the consequences. We know we have the support of not being alone in our opinions.
>
> (W.I.R.E.S., 1978)

Returning to our emphasis on values, we may quote Mansbridge (1973:353,354) who, while acknowledging the practical and psychological advantages of participatory groups, offers another answer to the question, why bother?

> Participatory democracy appeals primarily to deeply embedded norms . . . It is the search for a 'moral' way of relating to others that animates most attempts at participatory democracy.

CHAPTER 4

Three Short Case Studies

CHAPTER FOUR: THREE SHORT CASE STUDIES

I. PREAMBLE: WHAT IS A WOMEN'S CENTRE?

> (T)he women we met . . . have been feeling for a while that small groups around Cambridge were becoming more and more diffuse and scattered, and that the women's centre was not fulfilling its role as the starting place and meeting ground. Getting small groups to be part of a co-ordinated women's centre is a deliberate policy to pull the W L M in Cambridge together.
>
> (Cadman, Chester and Pivot, 1981:73)

Thus far, examples have been taken from a variety of situations which demonstrate the espousal and enactment of a value for equality in their organising activity. These have come primarily, but not exclusively, from the women's movement in Britain. Before proceeding to present some of the field work material it is appropriate to narrow the focus of attention. That is, to consider in what way Women's Centres constitute a special case within the area so far outlined.

As will be shown, a variety of forms prevails; these being dependent on the resources available locally, and shaped by the participants' abilities to create and use opportunities, and to perceive and respond to threats. However, notwithstanding these local variations, two defining characteristics are identifiable; that Women's Centres have definite spatial location and that they afford open access to all women. In this respect they form a visible and accessible facet of the women's movement and, in relative terms, show a greater degree of formalisation and continuity than other more flexible, more fluid and less open groupings.

There are around forty Women's Centres operating in Britain at present. The emphasis and details of the facilities which are provided will vary according to local conditions, but in general it is likely that most of the following areas will be covered:

i) A physical space for the use of women - as a meeting place for groups and for individuals 'dropping in'.

ii) An information and referral point for issues of particular pertinence to women and the locality.

iii) Initiation and co-ordination of activities - discussion groups, educational courses and campaigns.

Those cities and towns which have women's Centres are seen to show some variation over time. There are always some projects which are starting up and others which come to the end of their life. It may even happen, as in Segal's account of events in Islington (see page 67), that, over a number of years, different groups of women set up a Women's Centre in the same location. It can be argued with a fair degree of certainty that all concentrations of population of any size have the potential to establish a Women's Centre. Other manifestations of women's movement activity will occur, to a greater or lesser extent, in all population aggregates; only some locations will formalise a section of this activity in the establishment of a Women's Centre. Whether or not this occurs will depend on the value attached to such a provision, and the success of those who hold this value in mobilising resources towards its attainment.

It is not within the scope of this work to conduct a full discussion of the women's movement as an example of a social movement. No attempt will be made to assess the political impact of feminism or to consider the size and diversity of the movement. For this the reader is referred elsewhere (Coote and Campbell, 1982, Bouchier, 1983). However, it is considered that a Women's Centre may be taken as an example of a social movement organisation. It is therefore suggested that one perspective which may be taken towards Women's Centres is that they endeavour, by the provision of certain resources, to 'pin down' a section of the fluid, flexible and overlapping groupings which

constitute a social movement, while at the same time offering access into the movement for those who do not, at present, consider themselves members.

II. INTRODUCTION

In my original conception of the research design I intended to visit a number of Women's Centres unannounced. By this means I hoped to gauge the reception a newcomer might receive. However, after I had made a number of abortive trips, and traced one Centre through three different addresses, I realised I was expending a quite disproportionate amount of time for the small quantity of information gathered. I found that, even when I had been able to find out what the advertised opening hours were, Centres were often closed or had moved to another address. Possibly I was unfortunate in my experience, but whatever the reason 'dropping in' did not seem to be a viable research strategy.

Consequently, for the three organisations described in the remainder of this chapter, I made firm arrangements before I visited them and my arrival was expected. Clearly this changed the nature of the interaction from the original intentions since I was now defined as a researcher before face to face contact was made. Nevertheless much useful information was collected in this way. The particular usefulness of these short case studies is in the illustration of the variety of organisational form which can be adopted within the general remit. Shorn of some of the complexities and detail of the longer case studies, the interrelation between organisational and other factors is more simply exampled here, and thus provides a framework on which to build. The analyses here are, in terms of the formulation offered by Ranson et al (see pp 37, 56-57), medium term, in that the 'emergent regularities' of structure become the most visible aspects of the analysis. We shall show how different structural regularities may be

conceptualised as containing different arenas which appear as 'self-evident' (Weick, 1979; see p 49), and are, in given circumstances, excluded from negotiative processes. These 'self-evident' aspects of structural configurations are termed 'dominant stabilities', and examples are given in this chapter of the existence of different 'dominant stabilities' and of how different 'dominant stabilities' may act to channel political and organisational energies towards other aspects of the structural configuration.

Arlington Women's Centre was chosen because a woman who worked in Greystone Women's Centre had contacts there, Kington Women's Centre because it was conveniently situated near a station, and the National Women's Enquiry Service because they advertised for help in sorting out their files. The three case studies are concluded by a general discussion which assesses the organisational issues raised in this section.

III. ARLINGTON WOMEN'S CENTRE

Sheila had been involved with Arlington Women's Centre while she was living in London, but she had become disenchanted and had eventually dropped out. She described it as 'too successful' in the beginning - 'You could go there and not know anyone' - a period which was followed by a backlash when 'People seemed to stop going'. In particular she was disenchanted with the extreme factionalism within the Centre and the resultant stormy open meetings which took place once a month. Sheila introduced me to a friend of hers, Terry, who still lived in London and from whom I was able to gather more detailed information.

1. The Background

The original impetus for the setting up of a Women's Centre came from women who had been living in a Women's Aid refuge. In their

application to the council for planning permission the lack of facilities was described.

> On leaving the refuge (the women) often had to start a new life and found it difficult to keep in touch with the friends they had made there. They felt the need for a meeting place/social centre where they could stay in touch with each other, give each other help and support, and start new activities. In 1977 a group of these and other interested women got together to discuss this and found the whole group felt the need for a place where they could go for mutual support, to learn new skills, make friends or stay in touch.

The idea was further concretised when two of the workers from the refuge attended a conference in a Women's Centre in Holland 'before such things were thought of in Britain'. The realisation of the possibilities which they brought back to Arlington was important in giving the group a firm direction to pursue. Initially the kinds of activities they intended took place in a 'second stage' house (i.e. as part of the work of the refuge), but this was restricting both because of the other activities going on in the house, and because of the impossibility of advertising the address, which meant that information about the activities could only be conveyed through personal contacts in the local network.

An umbrella organisation of women's groups in the area, which was formed by the monthly meetings, already existed. This group was approached about the project and, with the Women's Aid group, established a joint action group to set up a Women's Centre. This group found it was able to obtain funding with almost laughable ease; an application was made 'as something of a joke' to the Urban Aid fund which granted them the £2,000 per annum for five years which they had requested. 'It was easier in those days.' At the time I spoke to Terry this funding was nearing its end. She considered that the amount of money was far from sufficient (which perhaps accounted for the ease with which it was granted). The group were able to find premises with very little difficulty due to the intervention of a sympathetic woman

councillor who enabled them to be 'given' a short life house. In all, the length of time from the initial initiative in the spring of 1978 to the opening in September 1979, was relatively short.

Terry described the short-life house as 'very bad and smelly', but went on to say how much enthusiasm there was in those days. 'There was no difficulty getting things done - people saw what needed doing and did it'. The house itself was ideally placed from the women's point of view. In their submission to council they emphasised this point, describing the house as, 'central to Arlington, close to the shopping centre, on good transport routes, and accessible from all parts of the borough'. They went on to say, 'These premises are very important for Arlington women. They will act as a focal point to gather the energies and interests of women of all ages and backgrounds in the borough. The place will then grow with the women who come to use it and take part in its activities.'

The same reasons which made the location of the house particularly suitable to the group of women were viewed more negatively by the local residents' association who lodged an objection to the granting of planning permission. The local newspaper reported the chairman of the residents' association as saying that he didn't want any more social services centres in the area. The report continued:

> 'It's become a Mecca for social service centres and social workers' he told the Journal. 'We want the quality of life to go up, not down. We don't object in principle to these centres but we don't want them all in Green Street.' he added.
> The group of women behind the centre say they are not social services. 'We are providing facilities for women to use. We are a self-help group,' they say. The women's centre will be improving things because it's giving women an opportunity to learn skills and languages and get out of the home.

A further extract from the women's submission to the council in respect of this planning application illustrates:

i) the extent to which the new development of the Women's Centre

was embedded in the existing network of the borough;

ii) the awareness that it was inappropriate to duplicate existing services; and

iii) the presumption that the provision of a Women's Centre could channel, focus and develop existing activities, and also aid the identification of gaps in current facilities.

It read:

> What can the Centre offer?
>
> The group has already reached out to local women by word of mouth and through a preliminary questionnaire; many have made specific suggestions for educational and social activities which they would like to have at the Centre. When the Centre opens we have plans for the following:
>
> First, classes in home maintenance, self-defence, yoga and keep-fit, and discussions of women's health issues and child-care.
>
> Second, information and resources for the needs of women, such as free pregnancy testing and legal, health and social matters. We do not intend to duplicate existing services in the area, but make use of and keep in close contact with them.
>
> Third, to fill an important gap in local facilities, a summer playscheme for up to forty children aged 5 - 15 years, using the Centre as a base . . . Funding is coming from the borough's Play Service . . . We plan to build on the contact the scheme will make with local women and their children.
>
> Fourth, the Centre will be available for contacts to be made and new groups formed, and act as a meeting place for existing women's groups. But just as important, the Centre will be a cosy, friendly place for women to drop in, have a cup of tea, meet friends (and let their children play and make friends in our creche), browse through the library and just relax.

Even though this submission was not particularly long or detailed, planning permission was granted by the council and the Centre opened officially in October 1979. Seemingly the objection by the residents' association was not taken too seriously and the council needed little persuading that the Women's Centre would be an asset to the borough. This had already been shown by the fact that the borough had funded the workers for the summer play scheme. Thus the relative ease with which this group of women were able to set up their Centre can be attributed

to the fact that they were working in an area which was already sufficiently orientated towards the provision of community facilities to recognise that this additional facility could be a useful one, and that there was already in existence a network of women who would operate and use the Centre. While the Centre was still at the planning stage the local newspaper carried regular announcements and reports of the monthly open meetings. These meetings took place in the local Social Services Centre and invited women to, 'Tea and biscuits, socialising and Women's Liberation Movement business (local, national and international)'. It is therefore apparent that before the Centre ever opened a great deal of the community work, in terms of interaction with the local council and the involvement of local women, had already taken place.

2. The Organisation

One point which must be made in relation to the amenable attitude of the local council is that the women asked for little in the way of resources beyond essential repairs to a short-life property. Equally, the amount of support they requested from the Urban Aid fund was not large. Importantly they did not apply for any money to pay for workers in the Centre. The conversations I had suggested that they did not do so for two related reasons. First, the pre-existence of the umbrella group together with the enthusiasm generated by the acquisition of the house made possible the assumption that there would not be a shortage of women to operate the Centre, and second, insofar as the question of paid workers ever did arise, it was rejected as part of a general anti-elitist stance. The organisational structure which was adopted was intended to minimise the risk of a particular group taking control of the Centre. In outline, what was intended was that all groups active in the borough should send representatives to the open monthly meetings

from which an executive co-ordinating committee of eight women would be elected. These members would serve for four months with a rotation of half the committee every two months. This format has persisted throughout the life of the Centre but, as Terry described it to me, 'It has done nothing to remove the splits, the sectionalism and the disenchantment'. As she saw it one group after another would 'take over' the Centre for a period and then fade away. This is not to say that she saw the turnover of women as necessarily a problem. Speaking of her own involvement she said, 'When you've organised three women's festivals it's time for someone else to do it'. On the other hand, the organisational format which was adopted did produce a very rapid rotation of the co-ordinating function.

The house which the Centre occupied was large -some eight rooms - and incorporated a caretaker's flat. The security given by the existence of these premises and of the funding (and the ease with which it was obtained) gave those women who were involved in the Centre a freedom from dealing with two areas of concern which typically preoccupy similar groups. These factors suggest an explanation for the stormy nature of the open meetings and the lack of concern for nurturing a strong core group to run the Centre. With these two important areas removed from the agenda of 'what has to be dealt with', there appeared to be little need to compromise on principles or politics in the policy discussions. In the same way, the fact that the Centre existed, and would continue to do so for some time without any great inputs of time and energy just devoted to keeping it in existence, allowed groups and individuals to use it without taking on much in the way of concomitant responsibility. It also allowed a strong anti-hierarchical ethos to prevail and quash any suggestion of paid workers. An early newsletter described the co-ordinating group as 'unpaid volunteers who do as much as they have time for'.

The end of the Centre's first year was marked by the local newspaper with a long article cataloguing the activities of the past year and outlining the plans for the future. These were considerable, and there seems no doubt that the Centre had taken off in a big way, with a mailing list of 450 and a regular newsletter. However, the open meetings, which were described in the article as, 'where we make all the decisions', were attended by between five and thirty-five women, depending on the perceived importance of the issues up for discussion. When I spoke to Terry she had recently attended a large meeting which had addressed the equally large question of what the Centre should be doing.

By 1982 a change in emphasis was apparent. A couple of women had attended a meeting of the newly formed Greater London Council Women's Committee and had returned to report to the open meeting that they thought it would be appropriate to apply to them for a grant. (By now the end of the Urban Aid money was in sight.) This meeting had no objection to the appointment of paid workers, although the preference was for more than one worker to avoid anyone having sole responsibility. Three women agreed to prepare a draft application and job description for discussion at the next meeting. Other items on this agenda indicated that the Centre in general was on a down-swing.

> The council has just been to the Centre to assess the extent of the dry rot, but they haven't told us yet when they will start the work. The Centre will have to be totally closed during that time, but verbally we've been told that they don't have plans for taking the house back.
>
> There is nowhere for children to play at the moment and so not very many children are coming.
>
> Do any more women want to sleep over while nobody lives here?
>
> The cafe isn't getting used very much either.
>
> Suggestion that it's very disillusioning to do drop-ins or cafe if not many women are coming. Maybe we should think of postponing them until after the dry rot has been done and everybody could put concerted energy into doing the place up a bit and advertising

everything that's going on.

Some women felt that it's important to keep the cafe and drop-ins going and are very prepared to do them and be more positive about it.

In conversation Terry identified three predominant and persistent areas of conflict, namely class, women with and without children and lesbians and heterosexual women. It appears that the early days of the Centre provided an environment in which these conflicts could be given full expression, while simultaneously the provision of a previously unavailable facility allowed a great deal of creative expression and enthusiastic activity. Enthusiasm waned as the facility of the Centre became more of a taken-for-granted, and the divisive nature of the conflicts took precedence. In an environment which is less supportive and a future which is less certain, it remains to be seen whether this will result in a group taking responsibility for rebuilding the strength of the Centre, or whether it will continue to decline.

IV. KINGTON WOMEN'S CENTRE

My initial contact was made by telephone, saying that I was going to be in London next week and would it be possible for me to drop in? I introduced myself as a member of the Greystone Women's Centre who were shortly to move into new premises, and with that in mind I would like to come and see how they did things at Kington. The response I received from the woman who answered the phone was friendly and I was told that they were open every day, but that perhaps I should ring to check before I came. In fact, with this introduction I decided not to, but to just turn up.

This Women's Centre is in an ideal location for its activities - close to the main line station, and sandwiched between the DHSS offices and a well-known red light district. I was impressed by how spacious and well-appointed the Centre was, having three large rooms, a kitchen,

a photocopier and so on. When I commented on this my contact told me that the same group of five women had been together for four or five years. During this time they had occupied a couple of squats in the area, each time doing the building up, but eventually being moved on by the council. Finally, the leader of the local council had used his position to allow pretty well unrestricted use of the present premises - 'until the council wants them back'. I described some of the difficulties Greystone Women's Centre had been experiencing with the local council, but it was soon obvious that this kind of problem was outside the experience of the women at Kington. On the contrary, I was told that the council saw them very much as 'a good thing' and that, 'we can really do whatever we want'. I was quickly beginning to realise that the political location of this Centre was very different from my previous experience.

I asked what kind of co-ordinating and decision making structures this group of women were working with. The answer was that 'we used to have more meetings than we do now'. For this group the effect of working together over a relatively long period had been to routinise a great deal of the task commitment and the understanding of appropriate activities. That is, there appeared to have built up over time a reliable assumption that work would be carried out and that the type of work undertaken would not conflict with a general collective orientation. Zoe, to whom I was talking, saw herself in a co-ordinating role - 'coming in to make sure the post is dealt with, that telephone messages are passed on, and so on.' She characterised the Centre as primarily a place for local groups to locate in and to focus on, but also as having an identity in itself. In this respect she saw the Centre very much as the nexus for local campaigning, and talked about their close association with the English Collective of Prostitutes and a practice of feminist solicitors. What she did not discuss as part of the work

of the Centre was an aspect which very often, in other locations, is seen as one of the primary functions, namely out-reach or drop-in work. This style of work did not seem to be any part of the brief they had given themselves. This 'recruiting activity' - getting other women involved - would take place at one remove; in the groups which then, compositely, became users of the Centre.

It is important to say that the foregoing is not to be taken as implying that newcomers were not well received by the Centre. I had been given a warm welcome myself, and I was told that a lot of their time was given to legal and welfare rights work. What is however true, is that coming into the Centre in this way did not carry with it an automatic invitation (and perhaps pressure) to become involved. Thus the women who made up the core group at Kington kept the co-ordinating and decision-making aspects of the work in the Centre within themselves, and were thus less subject to the need to negotiate and re-negotiate policies, directions and responsibilities. I was surprised to learn that there was another Women's Centre in the area, in fact literally round the corner, and my immediate reaction was to ask about the relationship between the two set-ups, rather assuming that it would be in some way conflictual. Zoe was quick to disaffirm me on this point, saying that they had a pretty good, complementary relationship with the other Centre who were 'more feminist', and concerned with self-help and therapy groups.

This fact provides a key to the particular configuration adopted by the women at Kington, for, in an area of high population and with a supportive local council, it is evidently possible for a degree of specialisation to occur between Women's Centres. This is not possible in smaller areas or in less supportive environments where the problem of being (or attempting to be) all things to all women frequently leads to a good deal of internal and external strife. Thus Kington had

adopted an approach which was less committedly feminist in that it did not allow all incomers open access to decision making, but far more effective politically, in the conventional sense, than many other Women's Centres. As an example of the first point, they did not turn men away from their advice sessions, seeing this as of no service to the women and children, but instead tried to get them to return with their wives. But it was the second area, that of campaigning and political activity, which was Kingtcn's particular forte. The close association with the local council has already been mentioned, and in this connection Zoe was able to talk about 'their success in getting a women's committee established within the Greater London Council.' (This can be seen in contrast to the position of Arlington Women's Centre who heard about the existence of this committee and then discussed what approach they should take to it.) Zoe also described their relation with the local newspaper as 'excellent', and presented me with a pile of press releases which included letters from the English Collective of Prostitutes to the Attorney General and evidence submitted to the Home Affairs sub-committee on Race Relations and Immigration by a group of Black women. The general publicity handout for the Centre emphasised both the legal advice work and the multi-cultural aspects of the work, including the fact that French, Italian and Spanish speakers were available.

The particular accents of the work of Kington Women's Centre reflect the needs of the area. In their publicity material for the launch of the legal advice service they describe the local community as '(one) which includes one of the most active red light districts in London and has a large immigrant population'. However, the <u>style</u> of the work with its well-connected confidence appears to derive more from the persistence of a strong group of women and the nature of the local political climate rather than from the attributes of the area. Zoe

described the women who were running the Centre as 'all creatively unemployed at the moment', and this equality of status and availability must have done much to remove many of the tensions apparent elsewhere where these equalities do not exist. She also spoke strongly about the advantages of involving 'everybody, even the Director of Social Services. Don't be afraid of going to the top.' In the case of Kington there is no doubt that this confidence was rewarded by a secure and influential position in the local political network. The fact that there may be compromises inherent in working in this way which are unacceptable to some feminists is evidenced by the nearby 'more feminist' Centre. However, in an area which can support two Centres, the differentiation and specialisation which is afforded appears as an advantage. There is less likelihood that the available energy will be spread so thinly and so disparately that much will be consumed in internal discussion in the process of trying to discover the most generally acceptable channels into which to direct energy.

V. THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S ENQUIRY SERVICE

NWES was set up in 1975 by the National Women's Liberation conference of that year to fulfil two main functions.

i) To provide an information service with comprehensive files of groups, contacts and campaigns.

ii) To issue a newsletter which aims to keep local groups and areas in touch with each others' ideas.

It was agreed at its inception that NWES should not operate from London to avoid centralisation, and further, that it should move to a different town every two to three years. My contact with NWES occurred during a period shortly after it had moved and the new group of women were engaged in updating the contact files by means of a questionnaire sent out with the newsletter. They had appealed for assistance in

collating this new information, and I replied by offering to work there for a week.

When I arrived I found that I was expected and that my name had been written into the calendar for that week. They were evidently quite used to people coming to work for a day or two, or for a longer period. Chris, the woman with whom I had originally made contact, told me that the collective was not very much in evidence at the moment. This was partly because it was the middle of the summer and some people were away, but also because they were in the printing phase of their fortnightly cycle and therefore most people were working outside the office. She herself normally worked two days a week, but at the moment was doing more than that. Recently two members of the collective had left and new ones had been taken on which added to the slightly abnormal circumstances at the time I was there. Chris told me that they were taking on the first women who offered to join them, but that she was not sure whether this was a good idea. There were some difficulties in integrating the new members into the collective, I asked if there were any accepted ways of dealing with women who didn't pull their weight or were in other ways difficult to work with, but the problem seemed to be one which was self-limiting. 'There was one who only came in to sit and chat, but she stopped coming.' There was a lot of hard and often tedious work to be done, and it would have been difficult for anyone to persist for long in avoiding this while still enjoying the benefits of working there. It seemed necessary to consider the work worthwhile in a wider sense, in order to accept the inevitability of some of the more tedious aspects.

NWES is unusual for a feminist (or indeed any) newsletter in that it has no editorial. They are prepared to print anything that is sent to them as long as it does not contravene the seven demands of the Women's Movement.[1] This means that the collective has a sometimes

1. See page 62.

strange invisibility, and months can go past without any contribution from the collective appearing in the newsletter. When one does it is usually to announce an open meeting or to appeal for financial support. If the occasion arises they will reply to criticisms received by them, or to inform a contributor that her letter has been cut for contravention of the seven demands or because it contains a personal attack on another woman. Primarily, however, the emphasis is on an information service and a forum for debate. The office contains large stocks of national and international feminist publications and card indexes of groups and contacts throughout the country. The women had not at first realised that, in addition to the newsletter, they were also expected to maintain and administer these files, and this was proving to be a considerable and unanticipated burden of work. In this respect the legacy they had inherited from the previous group was not a good one. There were boxes of files 'in no order at all', and there had been a 'total failure to update'. In all, plainly more than the collective themselves could deal with if they were to go on producing the newsletter. However, their appeal for help with this task had produced a response which was probably adequate to deal with the problem. I and another woman were working on it that week and a group from another town had promised to come the following week.

I spent most of the first day with Hilary doing 'some of the jobs which get left because nobody wants to do them'. This involved going through recent publications which the office had received to see if there was anything which was appropriate for reprinting in the newsletter, replying to letters - again anything which was not straightforward tended to get left on one side - and sorting through the responses to the questionnaire and putting the responses on file. None of this was very exciting work. On the other hand the fact of being at the centre of so much information, deciding how to reply to letters and

deciding on the content of the next issue were all enjoyable enough for Hilary, for one, to regularly spend an amount of her 'spare time' in this way. I was aware that our decision to work there not only assumed the motivation and interest to do so, but also the capability. This was a matter for reciprocity. The strongest impression I received during the few days I spent with NWES was how fully people like myself were accepted as temporary members of the collective. One particular incident illustrates this. Most of the full-time members were busy printing at this point, when one of them returned to the office to find a new design for the cover, as they had decided the one they were working with was unsuitable. While this discussion and the hasty search for a new design was taking place, my views were elicited and taken into account. There was no sense that I had anything less than full status as a contributor to the debate.

For the next couple of days I spent most of the time collating the newsletter and labelling it for posting. In itself this work was inevitably tedious, but the process was enlivened by the enjoyable and relaxed conversation that went with it. I commented on the good atmosphere generally and this was met with emphatic agreement from Chris. Another woman who had recently joined NWES talked about how working with a group of women was a new experience for her, and how she 'really liked it'. And, if further demonstration was needed, I was told that Hilary had worked late the night before. 'I think she just wanted to enjoy being here by herself.'

It is difficult to account for such vague attributes as 'a good atmosphere', and yet it is important to attempt some explication since this is seen as a generally positive and desirable attribute among Women's Centres and similar organisations. In the case of NWES this seemed to derive less from a conscious effort to create such an atmosphere than from the nature of the task. All the members of the

collective were aware that they were fortunate in being able to work in an autonomous women-only setting, and this was something which was valued for itself. The situation also allowed them to acquire and develop skills in a way which might not otherwise have been possible. For example, no one in the collective had known how to print initially, but they had been taught by a women's printing co-operative. This in itself is not particularly unusual, nor are the skills they acquired in organising and financial management, although both contributed to a degree of control over the work situation which is often desirable but infrequently achieved. However, I believe it was the fact of producing a newsletter regularly, taking into account the background which has been outlined above, which was of greatest importance. This has a number of effects which act to define the situation.

i) The production of the newsletter was a priority activity, and therefore a restriction on the amount of time available to spend examining actual or potential disagreements within the collective.

ii) A large proportion of the work was unskilled, and in this new or inexperienced members could contribute equally.

iii) The less urgent, but nonetheless essential work of answering letters and updating information allowed for more creativity and self-definition of task.

iv) The existence of NWES and the way it operated were not subject to questioning. It had received the mandate of a national conference, and was seen as a service to the Women's Movement which would temporarily reside with one group of women or another. Thus the existence of subscribers and the constant flow of letters and inquiries was a considerable acknowledgement that the task was appropriate and useful.

All these factors taken together are productive of a situation which is very receptive to incomers who are able to contribute to the

work of the collective. On the other hand there is not sufficient space - physically, as well as in terms of time and energy - to accomodate women who only want to 'sit and chat'. It is in this area that NWES is clearly different from a Women's Centre. While they are as open and welcoming as any Women's Centre would wish to be, it is within limits which are defined by the need to carry out certain tasks. A selectivity then operates both on the women who present themselves and on the way various behaviours are positively or negatively responded to by the existing group. For those who are able to operate comfortably within this setting the rewards are high.

VI. DISCUSSION

The three short case studies presented here provide examples of the variety of forms which can be assumed under the general label of autonomous non-hierarchical women-only organisations. While lacking the depth and detail of the longer case studies (which will appear in Chapters 6 and 7), they are useful as an introduction to description and analysis. Particularly, they show how differences in the stability of various factors in the organisational configuration are related to differences in the processual and environmental consequences. The three cases above can be regarded as each having their own dominant stability; in the case of Arlington, the premises, for Kington, the group, and for NWES, the task.

If we first consider Arlington, it is important to note here the ease with which the premises were acquired and the relatively supportive attitude of the local council. It was not necessary for the group of women involved with the initial application to work overly hard to persuade the council of the value of their case, and the resistance they met does not seem to have been difficult to overcome. With this firm base to work from, together with their pre-existing embeddedness in the

local network of women's groups, there was enough surplus time and energy to engage fully with the internal politics of the Centre. Unlike other situations which will be examined later they were not required to direct many of their resources towards either persuading the local authority to give them support, or towards persuading local women to identify with the Centre and to use it. The freedom they derived from this advantageous position permitted the adoption of a particularly 'pure' anti-hierarchical position. Until the Urban Aid funding was nearing its end they did not consider seriously the possibility of attempting to employ paid workers. In the early days there was no shortage of women who were willing to put some of their time into working in the Centre, and the system of co-ordination developed at that time was adequate to deal with the situation.

However, the other aspect of this situation, where the activities of the Centre were totally defined by its users, was very wide fluctuations in the women who used it and in the numbers of them. The women I spoke to described it at different times as 'hundreds of women there - but you could not know anyone', and 'rather depressing, very little used'. After the initial period of enthusiasm when it was tapping an accumulated need in the community, the Centre was subject to serial colonisation and abandonment by sub-groups within the locality. These variations were reflected in the attendance at the monthly co-ordinating meetings which could be small and desultry or large and heated. For both the women I spoke to this was the most characteristic face of the Women's Centre in Arlington. It appeared that many of the women who became involved with the Centre at various times retained a primary identification with a sectional group. The Centre then became for them an arena in which political differences could be expressed, and a facility which could be used when appropriate for acting out these differences. There was a relative paucity of women for whom the

Centre itself was a primary identification. It is not possible in this short case study to trace out the ramifications in these shifts in identification, colonisation and abandonment. However, it is important to draw attention to their existence here in laying the ground work for a more detailed processual analysis.

The case of Kington presents a different story. Here we see the effect of a small group of women working together over a number of years and gaining confidence and credibility as they did so. The orientation of this Centre was towards advice-giving and campaigning at a local and national level. In this area they had acquired a considerable degree of expertise and, for example, had been influential in the setting up of the GLC Women's Committee. The extent of their acceptance in the local political scene is also illustrated by their progression through a number of short life houses to a position where they could reasonably be assured that suitable premises would be found for them by the council. In comparison with some other Women's Centres they had to spend less time justifying their existence, and could assume there was a sufficient amount of support for their continuation within the borough. On the other hand, in developing a close relationship with the press and politicians in the area, the women at Kington had also developed a style of Centre which was less clearly feminist than some others. As has already been described, their advice sessions were not strictly women only, nor had they taken on a stance of totally open participation. While the Centre was open for individual advice and group work, it was also true to say that the running of the Centre was to a large extent contained within the core group. And, as my respondent told me, 'they now had fewer general discussions than in the past'. The maturation of this group had achieved a workable consensus in a style and approach for themselves, and this was only influenced by other users of the Centre to a limited

extent. Again we see how the time and energy requirements released from one (potential) direction are placed elsewhere: in this case in the direction of effective outside lobbying and campaigning. In this context, it is easy to see how the 'other' Women's Centre nearby was able to act in a complementary way to Kington.

NWES is obviously somewhat different from a self-designated Women's Centre. However, it is useful to include it here since it is also an autonomous non-hierarchical women-only organisation. The particular difference lies in its specificity of task which is also its raison d'etre - to produce a regular national newsletter for the Women's Movement. In other respects it exhibits a degree of openess and a participatory nature which is a common themein this research. However, these two characteristics are displayed within limits which are defined by the nature of the task. The collective is open both to newcomers and to temporary members, but the restriction on membership is that individuals should be willing and able to engage with the activities necessary to the production of the newsletter in a fairly self- directed and competent way. In this case, the demands of the work reduced the extent to which the collective could offer full support to women who had particular needs in the way of advice and help in the same manner as a Women's Centre would attempt to. There was time for 'sitting and chatting' while the more mundane tasks were being carried out, but this usually took place within limits defined by the process of producing the newsletter. However, the generally friendly and supportive atmosphere at NWES was readily apparent, and for the full time and temporary members of the collective who had the appropriate abilities and could appreciate the advantages of working in that setting, it operated in a way which was very close to an ideal state of participation and collectivity.

These short case studies serve as an introduction to the range of

possible organisational configurations within the general remit of the research. In the full case studies the different situational factors identified here can be examined more closely. In so doing we will be able to see, particularly when looking longitudinally, how different configurations flow into one another in response to, and in creation of, different circumstances. Additionally the full case studies will permit an examination and explication of processes which have only partial visibility in the foregoing accounts. Crucially, the long term presence of the researcher means that the individuals involved and the organising activities they engage in, can be approached much more closely, and that small shifts in the ongoing dynamics are retained, while they are commonly lost in the broader sweep of retrospective accounts. Thus, for example, the researcher's own involvement in organising groups allows for access to data which is not available to the 'visitor', and, as another example, the effects of within-group inequalities of position, class or attribute are made more apparent.

CHAPTER 5

Methodological and Analytical Strategy

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGICAL AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

I. INTRODUCTION

Having described the research design and data base of this study (Chapter Two), and introduced the research topic empirically (Chapter Four), this chapter will provide a detailed account of the methodological and analytical approach to the long case studies. The nature of participant observation and of interviewing will be discussed and illustrated in Sections III and IV against a background (Sections I and II) which emphasises the need for consistency between methods, the phenomena under investigation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and the approach to analysis (Pettigrew, 1973). In Section V we look at analysis and validity in case study research and Section VI provides a detailed account of the analytical strategy of this research.

While the method of this research has been strongly influenced by approaches which are usually considered to fall within the domain of sociology, its focus is nevertheless fundamentally organisational. Thus, attention has primarily been directed towards explicating participants' definitions of and perspectives on their own and others' organising activity. In organisational settings, such as Women's Centres, where participation is voluntary and part-time, the arenas where organising activity occurs are less self-evidently defined than appears to be the case in conventional organisations. Therefore, in the course of the field work effort was given to locating and attending to settings where organising activity was most concentrated (see Westerlund and Sjöstrand, 1979 for a similar definition of 'organisation'). In the presentation of the case studies the intention has been to provide the reader with an amount of data which is adequate for the purpose of achieving an appreciation of the situation which has both breadth and depth, but which nevertheless has

a directed focus. The intention is not to give global coverage of an area of social life, but to 'see' one aspect of it through the interrelation of various perspectives and understandings. To this end there is an inevitable selection of material, and for this responsibility resides with the researcher. I have included material which seems to be most necessary, most illuminating and most pertinent, and in the process of the research these categories have been arrived at through immersion in the study area and through interaction with those similarly involved. The case study accounts are therefore, finally, my own summation, but in most cases they have also received validation from other participants. In one case there was considerable disparity of views. Following a long discussion of the differences I agreed to some amendments in emphasis. However, differences remained which are indicated in the account of events at Greystone, and it is here in particular that I take responsibility for the partiality of the account.

II. ORIENTATION

In the past few years a number of writers (for example, Roberts, 1981, Stanley and Wise, 1983, Reason and Rowen, 1981) have put forward arguments which oppose both the feasibility and the desirability of methods of social research which follow from a positivist approach. The assumption that 'people can be reduced to a set of variables which are somehow equivalent across persons and across situations' (Reason & Rowen, 1981:xiv) is challenged.

An alternative approach arises from a tradition which includes phenomenology and ethnomethodology, but goes further in its emphasis on collaboration, reflexivity and action orientation (Reason and Rowen, 1981:xx). Specifically from a feminist perspective (Reinharz, 1983, Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983), the relationship between researcher

and 'subject' is highlighted, and it is strongly argued that this relationship should not be oppressive, hierarchical or manipulative. The choice of research methods is then not made solely by the application of 'efficiency' criteria, but should also include an assessment of the nature of the relationships created by the research. Particularly in the case of research on the women's movement this issue cannot be ignored; to do so is to invite a serious rejection of the validity of the work in question (Network, 1984). Examining the nature of the relationships created during research, and particularly field research, requires acknowledgement of the personal characteristics of the researcher (Burgess, 1984). It is interesting that Burgess (ibid: 90) focusses on instances where the fact of being female may 'limit or impede' the progress of the research. An alternative example is given by Papanek (1964:162) of the 'disability facing male field workers in purdah societies'. It is evident that field research into women-only settings can only be undertaken by women, and it is argued that, to some extent, the quality of the data obtained is dependent on respondents' perceptions of the researcher's familiarity and sympathy with the research context. In the present case the wish to undertake this research stemmed from a pre-existing interest in and commitment to the value of women-only organisations; my interest and commitment has been extended and strengthened in the course of the research.

III. THE NATURE OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

1. Discussions in the Literature

The question of access into research locations is one which commonly occupies some space in fieldwork manuals (for example, Johnson, 1975, Spradley, 1980). In the case of simple access to Women's Centres there is no problem for a woman and I describe my 'means of entry' in

the case study accounts. However, as I also describe, access is not in itself the means of building research relationships; the participative role is not static and is modified in the course of the study (Posner, 1980, Schwartz and Schwartz, 1954). An interesting feature of the particular settings in this study is that participation is voluntary and part-time, and in these terms the researcher may become as fully a participant as any other. This is contrary to the situation for most organisational research where the researcher typically has the choice between (a) remaining a 'researcher', outside the organisation, but able to move freely within it (for example, Berg, 1979), or (b) taking up a specified structural position within the organisation which permits shared experience with those similarly positioned, but inhibits free movement (for example, Morgan, 1975). The nature of field roles is a question which has occasioned more discussion among sociologists than organisational theorists (see, for example, Burgess, 1984:80-85). Generally, researchers are offered the choice of a position on a continuum from complete participant to complete observer (based on Gold's (1958) ideal-typification of research roles). My view, developed in the course of the field work, is that this continuum over-simplifies the reality of field research. The researcher does not adopt a single stance in the interests of data collection, nor even move between different roles at different times (Burgess, 1984:83). The real issue is the adoption of different stances and different awarenesses of the research setting <u>at the same time</u>. Cassell (1977:415) expresses this when she describes her simultaneous positioning as analyst and participant: 'it was the analyst who dealt with categories although the experiences of the same individual as participant may have helped to generate these categories'. Thus, as Phillips (1971) and Sanders (1980), among others, have argued, a component of participant observation should be the observation of one's own participation.

2. Participant Observation in this Research

The pertinence of these points is particularly seen in the account of events at Whitefield. At Greystone I had already formed a number of relationships with other participants before the research formally started, and it was not difficult to add in the tasks of recording, and later analysing, meetings and events. However, at Whitefield, as a newcomer, I was very conscious of a need to tread carefully, and was perhaps unduly influenced by approaches which warned of the dangers of over-identification with the setting. It was not long before I became aware that the continued adoption of a distanced and an uninvolved stance was making both myself and others uncomfortable, and was also effectively restricting the range of data to which I had access. I felt that other participants needed to know not only why I was there, but also who I was, and that they could only know this if I participated - by expressing my views, sharing information and taking actions. In seeking to find ways of maintaining a viable presence within the setting I became aware that other participants were constructing an identity for me that they could feel comfortable with. In practice this meant that there was a tendency to 'forget' the research role, and to treat the researcher as the sort of person they would expect to encounter in the setting, that is, someone with essentially the same interests and preoccupations as themselves. I believe that if I had not been able to show that I did share these interests I would not have been able to continue effective data collection, and also that I would not have been aware of these issues if I had not observed the nature of my own participation.

Two points follow from this description; first that 'certain kinds of data can only be obtained by being (or becoming) part of the group under study' (Cassel, 1977:416) and second, following from the first point, that the more established, and hence knowledgeable,

researcher is able to gain access to more material (Pettigrew, 1973) and greater understanding (Graen, 1975). The importance of knowledgeability on the part of the researcher is discussed further in the next section as an input into the interview process. In terms of the conduct of the field research, I considered, after the initial 'testing out' period, that I had no option other than to behave as I believe I would have done had I not also been carrying out research. The one possible exception to this I can identify is the fact that I was a more conscientious attender of meetings than might otherwise have been the case. I was aware, as Schwartz and Schwartz (1955:344) have noted, that 'the observer is part of the context being observed and he both modifies and is influenced by that context' and I have attempted to make clear all instances of my inputs into the flow of events in the case study accounts. In addition, as is the case for all field-workers, I made copious and often verbatim notes of events, constructed filing systems and tried to make conceptual sense of the data.

IV. THE NATURE OF INTERVIEWING

1. Discussions in the Literature

> Just as everyday social encounters involve situational definitions which can be problematic for participants, so the process of social interaction in the interview depends on the conceptualisations and constructions evolved by the interviewer and respondent. Second there is the problem of communication, or more precisely, the problem of understanding.
>
> (Brenner, 1978:122)

There is a considerable discrepancy between the nature of interviews which are conceived as an objective scientific instrument (cf. Goode and Hatt, 1952) and those which are conceived as purposive conversation (cf. Zweig, 1948). Each has an equally long tradition, but they differ greatly in the way in which the interview relationship is constructed. In the first case there is no long term relationship

between the participants - the interview should operate as a meeting of strangers, friendly but distanced. In addition, the formulation of the interview and the manner of its conduct are firmly in the hands of the interviewer. Thus, 'the interviewer is assumed to have power over the respondent who is given a subordinate role in this context' (Burgess, 1984:101). From this viewpoint the solution to any problem of communication is to 'educate the public to respond to questions on matters of interest to scientists and to do so in a manner advantageous to scientists' (Sjoberg and Nett, 1968:210). In the second case, the 'interview as conversation', the interview is embedded in a longer term relationship with the emphasis on equality and shared knowledge (Zweig, 1948).

Recent feminist discussions of interviewing practice (Oakley, 1981, Finch, 1984) have been critical of 'scientific' interviews. Oakley's (1981:41) own experience of interviewing women leads her to the following conclusions:

1) the use of prescribed interviewing practice is morally indefensible;
2) general and irreconcilable contradictions at the heart of the textbook paradigm are exposed; and
3) it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship.

In Oakley's view a contrary strategy for interviewing is as a means of documenting women's own account of their lives. In this case it is the <u>telling</u> which is given priority - questioning becomes a device for initiating and facilitating flow, not for directing and constraining. There is much here that is to be welcomed and endorsed.

However, with respect to the specific interviewing context, Oakley's work carries an unwarranted assumption which, although it does not affect her conclusions, has relevance if her protocol is to be applied to the interviewing undertaken in this study. To explain: it appears that being confronted by her respondents' tendency to ask questions of her has been a major influence in Oakley's rethinking of interviewing (1981:47). The same feeling of discomfort in this situation causes Hobson (1978:80-81) to illustrate, perhaps unwittingly, the different kinds of data which may be gathered in different interview situations:

> What I find most difficult is to resist commenting in a way which may direct the answers which the women give to my questions. However, when the taped interview ends we usually talk and then women ask me questions about my life and family. These questions often reflect areas where they have experienced ambivalent feelings in their own replies . . . In fact the informal talk after the interview often continues what the women have said during the interview.

Here we see the effect of a researcher-imposed distinction between the formal interview and the informal talk. In the 'interview' respondents suffered some discomfort which they were not able to resolve until they had more information about the interviewer. In other words, until they knew who they were talking to, they did not know what it was possible to say or what would be understood. This is what Oakley is talking about when she refers to 'irreconcilable contradictions'; the 'need for rapport and the requirement of between-interview comparability cannot be solved' (1981:51). (We may, in passing, wonder what Hobson did with the information she acquired in her informal talks.) Oakley's response to the same discomfort is to 'answer back' when asked questions by her respondents:

> The pilot interviews, together with my previous experience of interviewing, led me to decide that when I was asked questions I would answer them. The practice I followed was to answer all personal questions as fully as was required. For example, when women asked if I had read their hospital case notes I said I had.
>
> (ibid:47)

For her, the element of 'personal disclosure' is responsive and marginal; it is not placed centrally in the interview, and her decision which may be restated as one of deciding to withhold information unless asked for it, does not seem the best basis for establishing a 'non-hierarchical relationship'. As McRobbie (1982) has noted Oakley does not question the nature of the cooperation she receives, and she fails to recognise that her observation (echoed by many others) that it is easy to get people to talk at length and in detail about themselves, should not be taken as an assumption about human nature, but is more accurately seen as a finding of the research. The women whose lives Oakley was investigating were in situations where they lacked opportunities to talk about problems which concerned them (McRobbie 1982:50); while very common, this situation should not be assumed to be invariate.

Finch (1984:72) similarly records that she was 'startled by the readiness with which women talked to me', but in this case the researcher is able to recognise that the ease of the interview was in a large measure in 'contrast with the lack of opportunities to talk about themselves in this way in other circumstances'. The social isolation of women who are interviewed in their capacity as mothers or 'housewives' may be considerable, but it cannot be taken as 'normal', and nor must the ease with which these women are prepared to open up to a sympathetic interviewer. The experience which Finch (ibid:76) recounts is a common one:

> Women interviewees have begun to talk about key areas of their lives in ways which denote a high level of trust in me, and indicate that they expect me to understand what they mean simply because I am another woman.

However, as Wax (1952:35) reminds us, 'the fact that many informants talk freely because they are lonely or bored is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated'. I am suggesting that for women who are

isolated and lack opportunities to talk about themselves in the way Finch describes, there is a great deal which remains unstated in everyday life, but which is very easily triggered by the creation of an appropriately safe and sympathetic setting. For some women this opportunity for self expression may come when they encounter a feminist researcher, but it is more likely to occur in some kind of collective activity with other women.

2. Interviewing Procedures in this Research

The women I talked with in the course of this research were, a priori, through their association with a Women's Centre, relatively less isolated than those in Oakley's and Finch's studies. In this case 'agreements to talk' cannot be simply predicated on the existence of a woman-to-woman relationship, but are more accurately characterised as agreements to explore an area of mutual interest. Brenner (1978: 123) makes a similar point when he draws attention to the association between joint accomplishment and task agreement:

> Interaction can only be a joint accomplishment of participants if a task structure, or a structure of interaction, be it explicit in the form of a plan for interaction or implicit in the form of intention, has been, to some extent, agreed about. It is the task which provides the boundary to an interaction.

Argyris (1971:299) has argued that the unintended (and undesired) consequences of rigorous research 'reside in the degree of control the researcher has over the subject and the subject's resultant dependence, submissiveness and short-time perspective'. Many of these methodological weaknesses of the ungrounded interview are removed when it is placed in a stream of interactions, and conducted in a manner which is consistent with its context - namely, in a manner which takes cognizance of the importance of non-hierarchical relationships. The interview then becomes a powerful focussing tool to assess and reflect on the stream of events.

These points may now be illustrated by an account of the interviewing procedure adopted in this research. The choice of respondents was made on the basis of women who indicated by their frequency of attendance that they had the most interest in the Centre. It included all the paid workers and also those who had special access to background material. All the women I interviewed already knew me to some extent through my involvement with the Centre and were aware, at least in outline, of the nature of my research. My request was couched in terms of wanting to hear about their experience of and their views on what had happened and what was currently happening in the Women's Centre. No one refused this request, nor my subsequent one - that I tape-record our conversation. The interviews took place after approximately one year of field work.

My primary intention was to create a setting in which the participant's own story, and in particular her emphases, her weighting of issues and events and her sense-making constructions, could emerge. Thus, while I had a clear idea that there were a number of areas in which I wanted to hear about the participant's point of view, as far as possible I also wanted to hear about them within a narrative which was the participant's own construction. In this way individual experience is respected in its own terms and treated as authentic; the task of the researcher, or of anyone who is seeking an answer to the question, 'what happened?', is to explicate the variety of perspectives, preoccupations and meanings which negotiate a definition of a given situation. The extent to which the researcher's understanding may then be deeper and broader than that of the other participants rests largely on the extent to which she has requested and been granted access to the experience of others. The point at which greater understanding and analysis then begins is through the examination of the interstices, interactions and interrelations between various accounts (cf. Weick, 1979).

I started the interviews in a way which felt both logical and comfortable, by asking how the respondent had initially come into contact with the Women's Centre and how she had perceived it. There was thus an immediate invitation to include feelings, meanings and analysis in the simple chronology of events where the respondent considered them appropriate. Some quotations from the transcripts will illustrate how respondents expressed their feelings and subjective impressions as informing their understanding of issues and events. For example, some occurrences were given positive attribution:

> I liked the feel of it when I went for the interview.
>
> What felt so good was that a group of women had done it together.
>
> (It was) exciting because it seemed an opportunity that I hadn't really dreamt of.

Others were perceived negatively:

> When it (the Management Committee) started it felt strange.
>
> I think from that point on the safety of the atmosphere for discussing those issues, went.
>
> . . . using her as a secretary, which I really hated.

Some respondents indicated their awareness of different perceptions:

> It's fun for us to go in and see each other, and see what's going on . . . but people like X and Y do find them (the meetings) awfully boring,

while others indicated a desire for better understanding:

> We went into a room which was quite packed. I can remember my reaction was just very confused, afterwards hanging about, trying to find out.

The interviews also gave the respondents the opportunity to offer their own analysis of events and problem areas with which they had been involved and, while the demands of their work and other interests may have reduced the amount of time they gave to this, it became clear that a dimension of analytical or sense-making activity was a frequent adjunct to the rest of their behaviour (cf. page 55). Often this involved a process of <u>referencing</u> actions and events to the general

values of participation and non-hierarchy. For example, assessments were made of problems:

> The Centre was novel and it was trying to do - not trying to do the impossible because it did exist and it did get things together and it has continued, but the principles on which it was based are really difficult to work through;

of failures to enact the core values:

> There didn't seem to be the people that I knew were about the Centre a lot appearing on the Management Committee;
>
> Obviously I want anywhere I work to be run collectively, but it seems to me there's collectives and collectives. To have a group of women that turns up once a fortnight and then for us to be expected to share what's gone on, I mean that's not collectivity to me;

and of positive attributions:

> I think that was why Cadbury gave it (the grant) to us - because we were seen to be a living organisation.

The range of material which emerged from these interviews was considerable. The women I spoke to demonstrated that they were used to reflecting on their experiences and referencing them to a wider political and ideological context, and therefore their analyses are contributions to the analysis developed in this research (see Dubin (1971:65) for a similar observation). Thus the nature of the interviews, as I have already suggested, was one of a more reciprocal and balanced interchange than conventionally occurs in the gathering of social science data. In all cases but one I had experiences which were contemporaneous with those of the respondent and I had already had a number of conversations with her. To introduce the artefact of an interview situation which attempted to deny our pre-existing relationship or to treat it acontextually (cf. Platt, 1981) would have reduced the scope of the interaction. To repeat an earlier observation (see page 118), what is 'sayable' in any context depends on a belief that what is said will be understood. The following extract

from a transcript provides an example:

> Respondent: . . . it's a collective by name but it's a management committee by function and it's a sort of travesty really.
>
> Me: Yes, in the early meetings there was an issue to get together about and people were talking a lot more. Does this mean that you think collectives can only work if they are collectives of workers?
>
> Respondent: I don't know. I mean when Whitefield was working properly and it was run on a rota basis you'd have eight or possibly ten women going in regularly on a sessional basis and then every Monday afternoon we'd have meetings. I'm not even sure we called them collectives. And that seemed right, that the women who were running the Centre would meet once a week to discuss what was happening, where it would go, what was going to be put on, and it seems to me that's what's missing at Greystone - that feeling that there are a lot more women involved in the day to day process. I certainly don't want to lose the interest of women who can't come on a sessional basis; I think that's really important as well. But in a way that's less important than having women involved on a day to day basis. I mean the paid workers shouldn't be running the Centre, they should be there to facilitate other women to run the Centre.

It is possible to read this interchange omitting my remarks about the early meetings. However, the fact of their inclusion makes it clear to the respondent that I had experienced occasions when collectives 'worked' and would understand her response in those terms. Having established this parameter of shared experience, she was able to go on to explore the dimensions of this issue and relate it to the position she had worked out for her own role as a paid worker.

On other occasions the inclusion of some of my experience was useful in that it allowed me to appreciate the particular aspects of my situation and again my respondent was able to relate this to her perception of a more general problem area.

> Me: At that stage I never had any sense of working with other women. I went in on my own and I came out on my own. I felt that if a problem came up I was really dealing with it largely on my own resources and my knowledge of how you spoke to Supplementary Benefit Officials.

Respondent: It's interesting you say that because I think a lot of the other volunteers would say the opposite. I think you, because of your background and education were given that role, whereas a lot of the other volunteers were never allowed to do that.

Me: . . . this two-tier system which seemed to grow up?

Respondent: I think - you know you have to be realistic. Someone new coming in, doesn't even like answering the phone. All right, fair enough. But I mean that's a bit tricky when you're doing that kind of work. So it'll take them a lot of time and they would need someone with them who's done a bit more till they feel confident. Well, that's O.K., but it has implications, and we have other women like yourself who know the ropes, and can manage, so you've got two tiers whether you like it or not and the question is what you do with that. And I think we never really decided what we did with that.

In general my contributions to the interviews fell into three categories. First, an overall direction of the conversation, so that the areas I was interested in were covered. Second, a response to requests for information; these usually related to time periods where the respondent was not present and to my contacts with Women's Centres in other parts of the country, and third, in the more discursive parts of the conversation, an opportunity for me to obtain a response to my assessments of my experiences and to my partially formulated analyses. The essential feature of these conversations was that, by agreement, they were set up to allow a more focussed and extended attention to be given to the range of issues which were typically discussed in and around the fieldwork settings, albeit in a more fragmentary and truncated manner. The additional material filled in details of background and personal history.[1]

1. In one case, that of the woman who initiated the Women's Centre at Whitefield, there was no overlap with the period of the fieldwork. In this case the description of that period is based largely on her account.

In summary, the women I spoke to made it clear that they viewed their experience in Women's Centres reflexively in terms of a number of dimensions. These included:

i) the importance of feminism and politicisation processes;

ii) the nature of collectivity and styles of organising activity;

iii) the identification of recurrent problems and their associated temporary and partial solutions;

iv) history, continuity and change, and future directedness towards an ideal-typification of a Women's Centre.

These dimensions are detailed and examined in the case study accounts.

V. ANALYSIS AND VALIDITY IN CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Case study research has been characterised (House 1980:40) as 'complex, holistic and involv(ing) a myriad of interactive variables'. Its advantage is that it allows these variables to be studied 'intensely and simultaneously', and is the only method which can reveal the dynamics of phenomena which are 'political' or negotiated (Berg, 1979:32). Another characteristic, instanced by Yin (1984:23) is that 'the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined'. In terms of the multiplicity of factors operating in field studies it has been suggested (McGrath, 1979, Argyris, 1979) that some 'noise' - additional, extraneous and possibly obscuring material - is inevitable in accounts, as it is in life. The problem of 'defining' the phenomenon in relation to its context (Znaniecki, 1980) may be exacerbated if the subject matter is currently underexplored, or 'not currently in vogue' (ibid, 1980:68). It follows that, whatever line of analysis is advanced, it is also true that other lines could be advanced from the data which has been gathered or might have been gathered from the same setting if more attention had been given to aspects which currently constitute 'noise', or if the boundaries

between phenomenon and context had been differently drawn. The methodological problems in this situation are those of 'setting limits to the inquiry and of focussing on the categories within which the data can be assimilated and understood' (House, 1980:42).

These points may be illustrated by my experience in the field. At no time was I attempting to observe and record 'everything'; the focus of the research was always organisational, but my understanding of what this encompassed changed over time. Initially, perhaps, I attended too much to meetings, seeing these as the focal point of organisation. Later I became aware of two points which necessitated a modification of this perspective. First, that activities related to organising were not confined to meetings and occurred in a variety of more informal situations, and second, that participants were presenting an account of their feelings as a legitimate input into organising activities. In fact, I was beginning to identify a transferable mode of conduct, although initially I could not have labelled it in these terms. What I did perceive was a broad spread of interaction throughout a social network, of which meetings, as such, were only one of a number of nodal points. The question then became one of isolating out, either analytically or ideographically, organising activity from this broad sweep of social interaction. This question continued to be a background problem for some time while I continued to participate and record in the Women's Centre and other activities in the social network. Gradually the realisation came that there was a conflation here. The core values and mode of conduct were generalisable for interactions throughout the social network (and may be employed to construct a definition of a social movement (Brown and Hosking, 1986)). On the other hand participants themselves appeared to have no difficulty identifying when they were engaging in organising activity. This sense of organising activity can be summarised as a series of agreements

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to cooperate in purposive groups around issues which are perceived to require attention. In these groups decisions are rehearsed, actions initiated and the responsibility for pursuing these issues assured (cf. Argyris and Schon, 1978). The particular characteristic of organising activity in these settings, revealed through the longitudinal research design, is that these groupings may have a temporary and fluid nature. Once this realisation had been achieved, it was possible to pursue the emerging analysis in terms of the need for participants to hold skills of organising and to exercise them in a manner which was legitimate with respect to the core values of their social order.

Validity in case study research (Yin, 1984, Burgess, 1984, Pettigrew, 1973) is generally agreed to depend on the use of multiple sources to bring about 'convergence' or 'triangulation'. This has been done here by making use of written accounts of similar settings, participant observation and interviews. It is also commonly recommended (e.g. Yin, 1984) that key informants be asked to review the draft account. This was done, and has resulted in some modifications in the final version. Validity, in the sense of <u>explanatory usefulness</u>, has been argued (House, 1980) to depend on the audience which receives the account, and ultimately on the individual reader's interpretation in the light of her own experiences (ibid, 1980:90-91). While accepting this point, we may for simplicity delineate two broadly separable audiences. First, for participants in the women's movement, 'the answer to the problem . . . is to be tested by its usefulness in explaining troubles and issues as they are experienced' (Mills, 1959:145). This has been done through talks and other feedback sessions in which the analysis presented has received general agreement. Second, in terms of the academic audience, the requirement is that 'the phenomena in question be described in a terminology that would enable us to connect them to . . . existing theory' (Israel, 1961:273, quoted by

Berg, 1979). The review of the literature (Chapter 1) has described the themes and preoccupations of organisation theory as they pertain to the present study. However, as Reinharz (1983:183) has observed, 'there is no final interpretation valid "for all times", but simply an adequate interpretation which is endorsed by participants, confirmed by readers and cognitively satisfying to the researcher'. It is in this sense that the validity of this research is intended.

Finally in this section, a note on confidentiality. As Burgess (1984:206) has pointed out it is not possible without distorting the data, to completely disguise individuals and locations. Nevertheless, in the interests of respecting confidentiality as far as possible, the names of all people, places and institutions, other than those that are nationally known, have been changed.

VI. ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

It will be remembered that the main contention of this thesis is that non-hierarchical organisation is not 'natural' or 'spontaneous', but is struggled over and negotiated for. The analysis will show that this is the case, and will build towards a complex and interactive picture which identifies arenas of negotiation and the strategies and tactics which link them to the core values, and which will also explicate the flux of organisational energy, and show that it is dependent on the skills and resources of participants, and is channelled towards different arenas of negotiation at different times. This analysis builds on the findings of the short case studies and the examination of the cultural context, and is carried out in two further stages.

First, at the end of the two following chapters which describe the events at Whitefield Women's Centre and at Greystone Women's Centre, the field work data is summarised under three heads: (a) organisational

movement, (b) values: their espousal and enactment, and (c) relationships with the environment. The intention here is to develop the relatively static analyses of the short case studies by attending to the horizontal dimensions of the analysis which are revealed through a longitudinal and processual approach. This horizontal analysis is informed by the findings which describe structural configurations - the 'dominant stabilities' identified in the short case studies - and the findings which identify a shared set of 'core values' in the cultural context, but the particular intention is to gain a sense of the various continuities and changes over time and their interrelations. In addition, a more detailed account of the nature of relationships with the environmental context than was possible in the short case studies, is provided.

Second, the discussion in Chapter 8 takes overlapping thematic 'slices' through the empirical evidence. Arenas of negotiation are abstracted from the flow of events, and in turn we examine the nature of participation, power and influence, skills and differentials, relationships with the environment and with the cultural context, and the nature of success. Here we are able to bring together data from the five case studies, identify similarities and differences, and proceed to analytical generalizations which explicate the phenomena under investigation. In this way the requirements for a connectable vertical and horizontal analysis (page 39) are met and result in an holistic analytic description.

1) The Long Case Studies

Looking first in more detail at the categories of the long case study summaries, the following points are pertinent:

(a) The term organisational movement is preferred to the more usual organisational change, since there is a sense in which the

latter implies change from some pre-existing structural configuration or assumed modus operandi. In the case of innovative non-hierarchical organisations such base-line assumptions cannot be made, and the lack of models available to be received or imitated has already been noted (pp 24-25, 66). The short case studies have shown some of the variations which may arise in this situation; in the long case studies we are able to observe variations over time, and thus the movement of organisational configurations. In these sections we also note the influence of a number of key participants, and some reference is made to the content and context of organisational movement.

(b) The sections on Values focus on the content of organisational movement. Referring back to the findings of Charter 3, we look for further evidence for the existence of the core values, at who holds them, how they are enacted and at any problems which may result. We are here able to observe a reflexive monitoring by participants of the enacted mode of conduct, and of movement towards the desired end state, and to note the use of strategic and tactical initiatives which negotiate the form and direction of the organisation.

(c) The sections on relationships with the environment focus on the context of organisational movement. (The environment is taken here to be those sections of the environment which are other than actual or potential participants in the women's movement (see page 79). The meaning of the distinction between the extra- and intra-movement environmental contexts is discussed in Chapter 6, Section V.) In these sections we look at the form and timing of interactions with the extra-movement environment and are able to observe that, in general, such interactions are intermittent and are associated with threats and opportunities to restrict or enhance expressions of the core values. At other times, when threats or opportunities are not perceived, organisational energy is directed elsewhere (in line with our arguments

concerning the role of 'dominant stabilities'), typically towards internal processes. We further note the need for the exercise of organising skills (see page 58) in building relationships with the environment, and that a shortage of these skills may inhibit or delay organisational movement in the desired direction.

2. The Analytical Discussion

Having summarised the data in the long case studies in this manner, we will be in a position to present a thematic analysis of the empirical material. The categories of the discussion which comprises Chapter 8 derive from the initial study questions (pp 46, 56-57) and are also informed by the findings of Chapter 3 which described the cultural context of this research. This approach will permit an examination of themes and issues which are implied, but not fully explicated, in the summaries to Chapters 6 and 7. (It should be pointed out here that, of the many issues of interest raised by this exploratory study, not all have been pursued to the same extent. For example, further work would clearly be warranted on decision making processes in non-hierarchical organisations, and it would be interesting to explore in more depth the nature and extent of participation in social movement organisations.)

It is pertinent at this point to review the findings of Chapter 3 and relate these to the research questions which have been posed, in order to detail the categories of the analytical discussion. It has been shown (pp 63 - 67) that 'communalities in the style of feminist organisations' (page 46) exist and consist of 'core values' for the sharing of skills and tasks, participation by all and a rejection of hierarchical forms. It was considered likely (p 46) that related issues of relevance might include relationships with the hierarchically structured environment, the maintenance of participation and questions

of leadership and power. These suggestions are reinforced and have been focussed by the identification of a number of problem areas which are found to arise in attempts to construct a social order with reference to the shared 'core values'. It has been shown (pp 67 - 79) that the pursuit of equality in non-hierarchical organisation is likely to be constrained by variations in the levels of skill and knowledge, power and influence, and in the extent of commitment of participants, and by the need to form relationships with the hierarchically organised environment. Negotiative processes are directed towards minimising differentials which are seen to be reducible and/or minimising the effect of differentials which are not seen to be reducible, and it is shown that different groups may adopt different tactical solutions to similar problems. For example, on pp 75 - 76 the question of whether or not to employ paid workers is differently assessed by two different groups, but in both cases there is recognition that such an assessment has implications in terms of the 'core values'.

A theme which runs through the discussion in Chapter 3 is that the process of attempting to construct non-hierarchical organisation is one which may place heavy demands on participants (see, for example, p 69) in terms of the skills and time involved, but which nevertheless is a worthwhile endeavour since it provides a means of enacting a particular system of values which are deemed to be important. The application of these values to the processes of organising carries with it the requirement that contributions to social order are perceived as legitimate (see p p 57-58), and it is considered that the over-riding problem facing participants is to devise ways of accumulating and exercising their organising skills in a legitimate manner. We have also noted (pp 57 - 58) that when organisations such as Women's Centres operate an 'open door' policy to any interested women, the process of assimilating newcomers may provide an additional arena of

negotiation which is not experienced by 'closed' groups.

Bringing these findings and observations together provides the analytical categories under which the research questions are discussed:

(a) The section on participation examines the nature of participation, variations in individual levels of commitment, and definitions of 'representativeness' in open groups, and looks at the tactics which may be adopted to handle any perceived problems in these areas.

(b) The section on power and influence looks at the difficulties of removing differentials in this area, particularly where there is a mix of paid and voluntary workers, and at the demands placed on participants when attempts are made to reduce differentials.

(c) The section on skills and differentials develops the discussions of sections (a) and (b) above by observing the need for organising skills on the part of participants in order to manage competing 'pulls' on the organisation, and the difficulties which may restrict a continuity of skilled participation.

(d) In this section the problem of locating in the environment is examined in relation to an environmental context which consists of extra- and intra-movement components (see above). We are here able to provide additional evidence for the role of 'dominant stabilities' in affecting the nature and timing of environmental interchanges.

(e) The section on receiving and recreating the cultural context returns to questions of leadership and power by examining responses and reactions to the perceptions of accumulations of leadership acts, and shows how these responses and reactions are informed by the shared 'core values'.

(f) Finally, dual criteria for the success of Women's Centres are constructed. These criteria show clearly the importance of the relationship between the form of social organisation and the values for a particular mode of conduct and a desired end state of existence.

CHAPTER 6

Whitefield Women's Centre

CHAPTER SIX: WHITEFIELD WOMEN'S CENTRE

I. INTRODUCTION

The Community Project in which Whitefield Women's Centre was first located came into existence in 1973 when a group of people who had been looking for a base for community activities successfully fought the proposed demolition of a local school. The project survived, and received some financial assistance from the County and District council, charitable trusts and local organisations. In 1980 the situation was reconsidered by the District Council who decided to terminate the lease in 1982 and demolish the building to make way for a car park. A campaign to protest at this decision was mounted and, after a petition bearing 10,000 signatures had been submitted to the Council, a public inquiry was organised. The Inspector from the Department of the Environment was strongly supportive of the Project and commented:

> Whitefield, and the south town in particular, exhibits levels of social deprivation normally expected to be found in inner city areas. As the work of the Project has progressed and grown the need for its facilities and the existence of the workers associated with it has been clearly demonstrated . . . From the evidence put before me I am convinced that the work carried out by the Project is of vital importance in Whitefield.

Shortly after this an Urban Aid grant was made available for the purchase and repair of the building.

The field work at this location was carried out between 1981 and 1983. The events described in the first section of this case study took place prior to the field work and form an essential preamble to it. I am grateful to the women who gave so freely of their time in allowing me access to this background information.

II. THE EARLY DAYS

Although any starting point in tracing out historical antecedents is ultimately an arbitrary one, in this case it is appropriate to begin with the appointment of a new community worker to the Project. At this time the Project received funding under the Urban Aid Programme and was largely independent of the statutory services. The attitudes which the new worker brought to the job were in many ways at variance with the attitudes and assumptions which already existed within the Project. It is the working out of these differences and the challenges they posed which forms a central theme of the story. The focus is women and the important change is from a position of work <u>for</u> women, to one of work <u>with</u> women.

Jill found that she had inherited a 'problem-centred' approach to community work; one which identified groups in need, such as poor families and ethnic minorities, and proceeded to produce a remedial programme for them. Her area of work included the play-group and, 'What had been called the Family Centre, which was really just the coffee bar and the women who came in with kids. It was all about involving the mothers.' She recalled her distaste for the patronising tone of the workers' meetings at that time, with their references to 'helping the women to learn to cook and budget', and 'teaching them how to sew'. There were practical difficulties as well in working with the mothers'and toddlers' group at that time since a group of men used to frequently take over the coffee bar and, 'they were deliberately intimidating so that people were just bothered about being in the building at all'.

This kind of occurrence, together with Jill's feeling that she did not want to work in the traditional way, converged on the suggestion that, for one afternoon in the week, the building should only be open to women. By this means the problem of the threatening environment should

be removed, and a space created in which more equitable ways of working could be devised. Monday afternoon was chosen since the building was normally little used at this time. I asked Jill whether it was difficult to get the other workers to agree to this change. She recalled that at first there had been little more than 'rumblings', but as time went on more openly obstructive and antagonistic behaviour appeared.

> John never worked on a Monday afternoon, but he started to. 'Would he be allowed to work in his office, or was he excluded from the building?' - these sorts of things, which obviously we weren't saying. We weren't even taking over the whole building - there were certain rooms we were using - other than that people could come in through the other entrance. The school[1] would obviously keep on; they generally had a trip once a week and they were fine about that, they just said they'd have the trip on Monday afternoons, and you know John's room was fine if he wanted to work in his room. He didn't have a session where people came in to see him, but he started to see people quite deliberately and then moved into the coffee bar where we were and started talking to people so you had to ask him to go. It just became really uncomfortable . . . It was a day when hardly anyone worked, 'cos the staff meeting was at lunch time and after that the building more or less closed down. But suddenly we were stopping all these hoards of people from coming in!

The other problem Jill had to face up to was the fact that very few women were coming in. The people who had been enthusiastic and supportive about the initial idea were too involved in other things to give it much time and there was no core of commitment on which to build. She was also being made increasingly uncomfortable by the sense of covert hostility within the Project, to the extent that, in this instance, she felt unable to use the usual forums it provided for discussing problems. This lack of confidence on Jill's part delayed, but fortunately did not prevent, one of the youth workers from seeing the difficulties she was experiencing and making the suggestion that

1. The school was a separate unit housed in the same building which catered for the needs of children who were long-term truants or experienced other schooling difficulties.

they try to work together to set up something for women.

> There was a room in the building which had not been used for years. (Jane said) 'Let's get on and do something with this room, move out all the junk, so we've got a room in the building.' She knew (the Project) far more than I did. She prepared the ground by just saying, 'Let's clear the room and lay claim to it.' She did all that and fought it out in the meeting, and it was right what she said, everybody did lay claim to it. What she got through in the end was that the women from the young women's group who'd actually done the work - not that it'd be their room - but they would have certain sessions which were theirs in a week, and then they would have to deal with the competing claims of other people, so in that way she got total control over the room.

Jill had been thinking about the idea of a Women's Centre for some time, but for her they were the sort of thing that happened in big cities, not in small places like Whitefield. As she continued to work with Jane there was a gradual realisation that setting up a Women's Centre was indeed what they were doing. They were arranging sessions on welfare rights and other issues three or four times a week, and these were well attended.

> All these people arrived, and afterwards we'd say, 'Who was that?' thinking the other had known them, and neither of us had seen them before. The women who came along sat and listened and then we discussed things . . . and they appeared the next week. I think it must be that they wanted a Women's Centre.

Since these sessions took place during the day they obviously precluded women who had full-time jobs, so I asked Jill what kind of women were coming. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of the early days with the mothers' and toddlers' group, what she remembered was mostly women without children, often with associations with the university, as well as some who belonged to a Women's Aid group. What seems to have been happening, to some extent at least, was that the facilitating work of Jill and Jane was attracting into the building women who had not previously been involved with the Project, but who did have some pre-existing notions about the value of a Women's Centre. One important point which Jill recalled from the days when 'it really was a fantastic

group', was the debate which rejected the idea of a worker/client approach to the women who came in. Part of the definition of a Women's Centre which emerged in the course of these discussions was that the style of interaction should consciously attempt to be different from the patronising approach which Jill had so disliked when she first came to the job. 'Those people who were around and Jane and I sat down and worked out our feelings about that kind of thing, about what a Women's Centre would be, what it was there for - it wasn't there to help women with their problems as such. Not that we wouldn't help them with their problems, but it wasn't like an alternative social services.' The picture this group painted of what the Centre was, or could be, is both clear and imprecise.

> Somewhere for women to be with other women where you had space as women. It was in terms of day schools and so on, but just saying more positively there's a way of coming together other than separate little women's groups and separate women who aren't involved; to actually have the resources, space and everything to make the sort of things you wanted to do more effective. It was fairly vague in general, and what we felt apart from anything else was that we weren't sure what we were letting ourselves in for, and that we could only work it out gradually as we realised what sort of women were coming in, what they were looking for . . . We just weren't sure - whether women who would come in would be women who were already in women's groups, involved in feminist things, academic as well! Or whether you may get lots of women who just had no contact with any sort of women's movement, who wanted more practical things to do with their lives. We really just had no idea. I think it's probably gone along with that mixture of things. You're never quite sure; there are competing claims on a Women's Centre - you're never quite sure how to resolve the conflicts.

Here, there is a sense that the particularities of day-to-day activities will be continually under negotiation, depending on who is using the Centre, but also, preceding this, is the importance of creating a certain kind of setting as a base-line for other activities. 'The feeling, "Well, we've got something here", to feel that it was there, even if it wasn't doing much. I think everyone just enjoyed having their space in the building to sit and chat to each other - that was nice in itself'.

However, at the same time as the Women's Centre was beginning to find its feet, in its own terms, it was still being subjected to some hostility from the rest of the Project. For the most part this remained below the surface, but occasionally emerged in a very unpleasant way. A community magazine was produced which contained a thinly-disguised personal attack on Jill and Jane's work. The article was printed under a female name, which later turned out to be the nom de plume of a man who resented the idea of women-only space within the building. The resulting furore led to a full Project meeting at which both sides mobilised their forces and Jill realised, 'even people I'd known in the Project who I thought were sympathetic . . . they were really hostile.' The meeting resolved the immediate issue by drawing up guidelines for any publication coming out of the Project - 'the kind of guidelines that made it impossible for anything to come out, so the thing as it was died a death, but there was still incredible distrust around you; you couldn't forget it, you still had to work with the same people.' On the other hand the act of mobilisation had both strengthened the Women's Centre in itself, and had made those opposed to it recognise the extent to which it enjoyed a broad base of support among other community groups. One positive outcome from these events was that the Centre could establish itself more firmly, and publicly announced its 'opening' in June 1981.

The more prestigious and established position it came to occupy within the Project over the next year was obviously a relief after the early battles, but the Centre was still restricted in the degree of autonomy it could claim. In one way this was caused by other members claiming credit for work they had done with the Centre, but primarily it was because the structure of the Project meant that all areas of work were ultimately accountable to a Management Committee. As the worker responsible for this area, Jill was required to write reports

for this committee (which in itself went against her attempts to work in a non-hierarchical way). She felt that this stricture was ultimately a restriction on the development of the Centre; even if the potential censure never occurred it remained a threat.

> Even if the Management Committee doesn't comment at all on what's gone on there, there's still that threat, that it's basically accountable, you're supposed to write reports to go to the Management Committee. You can write what the hell you like in them, but you're supposed to write something. And they could turn round and say, 'Well we know that's not what's been going on. What has been going on?'

Summary

The events described above, which took place prior to the field work, show a considerable amount of organisational movement. By the summer of 1981 the Centre had claimed a space of its own within the building which was well populated by women, and some of its activities were received as prestigious by the Project as a whole. On the other hand, a degree of antagonism remained as did the restrictions which arose from the pre-existing structure of the Project. The negotiations between the different structural, behavioural and ideological interests represented here continued throughout the period of field work.

Note

Throughout my conversations with Jill she referred to the 'Women's Centre'. This name also appeared in bold type in the publicity material announcing the opening. However, in the same material the following statement was made;

> We are a group of local women who are working towards setting up a Women's Centre at (the Project). There is already a 'Women's Room' equipped with kitchen facilities, children's toys and comfy furniture. We have been meeting to discuss ways of setting up a Centre. One of the main aims would be for it to be a meeting place and contact point for all women in the area. We are gathering information on services and facilities available to local women such as health, housing, employment, education, childcare, transport . . .

As time went on the 'Women's Room'and the proposed Women's Centre diverged into more clearly separable entities. Initially the two terms were used either interchangeably or as implying that the first historically preceeded the second. The conceptual separation later did not, however, mean that there was not considerable overlap of participation.

III. THE FIELDWORK: 1981 - 1983

The account which follows describes and discusses the events of this period, but it should also be read as containing within it an account of the methodological development which took place as the work progressed. In simple terms I started the work with only minimal contacts and living in another town, and ended it living in the same town with a large number of contacts (and, not incidentally, friends). Therefore the development of theoretical understanding runs in parallel with the progression from a narrowly defined, and largely instrumental, approach to the fieldwork to a more broadly based involvement with a corresponding increase in information and insight.

1. Access

In one sense gaining access to a Women's Centre is easy, since its rubric always acknowledges the importance of being open to all women. In practice, of course, real access to centres of influence and decision making is negotiated more slowly in a process involving the development of trust and legitimation. At several points in the course of the work I found it necessary to make decisions which had the effect of increasing my involvement in the on-going activities. Failure to do so would, I felt, have severely reduced the value of the work and could even have made it impossible to continue. I attempted to be as open as possible about what I was doing and no one I spoke to

was antagonistic to the idea of the research, although some mild apprehension was expressed. In general I was pleasantly surprised to find how receptive people were to the idea, but it was also not long before I realised there was only limited tolerance for the 'fly on the wall' approach; I had to allow myself to be drawn into the situation.

By October 1981 Jill had decided to leave her job and go to university. While this was obviously a personal decision she also saw it as important in terms of the Centre's future.

> It was for my reasons that I left, but I think it was good anyway. When I went there there were so many people around who had this expectation that I would be (my predecessor), and I wasn't going to be her, but neither could I break away and be anything much else. It needed somebody to sit back and say, 'I'm not doing that', before anybody else could come in and say, 'I'm somebody different'.

The 'somebody different' who took up the job was Ruth, who had been working in a women's refuge, but before that was a member of the Women's Aid group which had been part of the Monday afternoon meetings.

2. Getting In

I had been aware of the publicity which accompanied the opening of the Women's Centre in Whitefield in the summer of 1981, and had noted it as a potential location for fieldwork. At that time I had no contact with anyone who was involved in the endeavour. In October of that year I met two women who were working in the Centre at a party and introduced myself to them. I told them I was doing research on Women's Centres and that I was interested in the possibility of Whitefield as one of my main locations. One of them told me that it had not been going for long and that there were lots of problems. When I asked, 'What sort?' she said I would soon see if I turned up. The other woman was more forthcoming and was enthusiastic about the idea of the research. She told me that there were a number of women's groups in Whitefield but that in her view they were middle class and fairly hard

to penetrate, in that they were not publicised and that in order to get in it was necessary to know the right people. She felt that they were not really available for 'ordinary' women - implying women like herself. Her view of the Women's Centre was similarly that it was overlaid with elitism in that it was not felt to be a very welcoming place, and that women seemed to feel they had to have 'a problem' to come in. Whether these were her views, or ones which she knew existed, was not clear since she was one of the women who worked on the rota. She described one of the difficulties she did feel in this respect: 'Perhaps when it's your turn on the rota you don't feel like being very welcoming, but people should be brought in and given a cup of coffee'. I said that I'd like to talk to more women and she invited me to come to the admin meeting next week - 'You'll find it very boring'.

My notes from the first few meetings I attended clearly show that I was far too busy trying to work out what was going on to find them boring. I was working intensively in an attempt to record the activities and interactions of the people present, to figure out who people were (and my notes record a number of sometimes inaccurate guesses as to who were 'staff'), and to become aware of the preoccupying issues, at the same time as being conscious of my own presentation and imputs into the meeting. To begin with I made notes in the meetings but I became aware from the glances I was getting that this was making others (and myself) uncomfortable. I soon found that with a little practice, and the help of a few 'key words', I could produce an adequately full account of the meetings I attended, if I recorded them soon afterwards.

At the first meeting I used two conversational openings as a way of introducing myself into the discussion. The first of these was a small piece about the Centre which had appeared in the Guardian the previous week, and the second the fact that I had been working in

Greystone Women's Centre, and could therefore draw on that experience where it seemed pertinent. What I did not do, in spite of the information from my informant at the party, was to in any way present myself as a woman with a 'problem'. The article in the Guardian (which was only a few lines long) had caused some embarrassment to the two women whose names appeared with it. They had written a long letter about setting up a self-help group for mothers of three-year olds but, as it was described to me, 'The letter had been subbed out of all recognition, so that it appeared as if the Women's Centre was these two women. People were wondering what had been going on'. In this conversation, and in general throughout the meeting I was impressed by the friendly and relaxed way in which it was conducted. Even though there were some contentious issues most of the women present spoke at some point, and were listened to. Those who arrived late were quietly told of the items on the agenda and given a brief resume of the discussion so far.

The issues which the meeting considered can be located at three organisational levels; within the Centre, within the Project, and in relation to agencies outside the Project. Within the Centre the main form of communication between the different rota workers was through the day-book. This was supposed to contain a full enough record of events and people for one worker to pick up where another had left off, and this, it seemed, had not been done. 'There's too much going on which is not clear.' The problem within the Project centred around the reallocation of rooms in the building. This discussion took up a lot of time in subsequent meetings, but on this occasion the pressing nature of the threats from the local Council assumed a priority. It had been known for some time that the Council was intending to demolish the building and turn the site into a car park, and on this issue the feeling was that it was possible to fight by mounting a campaign.

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However, a second version of the Council's intentions, which had been leaked the previous week, was that the building was to be sold to property developers in a deal involving a lot of money. 'There are emergency meetings going on all over the place.'

I felt that I had arrived in a very eventful period and, while I still consider this to be true, conversations about the preceeding period together with my subsequent experiences do suggest an element of 'if it's not one thing, it's another'. In other words, debates, actions and reactions occurred in, and between the three organisational levels outlined in the previous paragraph throughout the period of study. While I was working to develop a familiarity with the particular mixture of issues, preoccupations and people I had walked into, I also had to consider my own impact on the situation. By the end of the first meeting, although nothing was said directly, I realised there was some confusion as to whether I was to be seen as a representative of Greystone, or as an 'ordinary' woman who wanted to become involved in Whitefield Women's Centre. I decided that in order to avoid some 'special' or 'outsider' status I would offer to work on the rota.

3. Becoming Accepted

I made this offer at the next meeting I attended, and was surprised to find that there was apparently no shortage of women who were prepared to do this. There were between two and five names down for each session which was very much in contrast to my experience in Greystone where there was almost always a shortage of women prepared to work on the rota. Again, in relation to my previous experience I was impressed by the relaxed atmosphere, and the fact that there was no talk of 'commitment', but only an invitation to 'come in sometimes'. I later learned that the time I arrived in the Centre was seen as being towards the end of the initial 'honeymoon' phase. One woman I spoke

to described this as the time when it was 'working properly'.

> It was run on a rota basis and you'd have about eight or possibly ten women going in regularly on a sessional basis, and then every Monday afternoon we'd have meetings at which Ruth would sometimes be involved and sometimes not, depending on whether she could go or not. And that seemed right - that the women who were running the Centre would meet once a week and discuss what was happening, where it would go, what was going to be put on . . .

There was a subsequent drop in the level of interest which was exacerbated by the fact that a number of women who had been putting a lot of time into the Centre got jobs. Whether or not it was strictly true, it appeared to Ruth that there was some connection between the timing of her appointment and this falling off of interest, which not unnaturally made her feel uncomfortable.

> By the time I got there it was fading. It wasn't just lack of interest, though that was a part of it. I mean people got jobs - it relies quite a lot on unemployed women. I felt very bad about that because it coincided with me taking the job, and I just thought I've scared everyone away by taking too much on myself. I think there might have been a bit of that in it, but in fact I suspect it wasn't just that, because apart from anything else there's enough for people to do, and more.

By this Ruth meant that working in the Women's Centre was only one of a number of things unemployed women could choose to do with their time. She did not consider it unusual that some women would want to direct their time and energy differently, or to make different choices at different times.

The main purpose of this meeting at the end of October, 1981 was to deal with the deferred matter of room allocation within the building. Although it took place in the women's Room three men were present; a member of the dance company resident in the building, a teacher in the school, and someone who, from his forceful style, I took to be the community team leader, but was in fact a local councillor who ran a housing advice session. The terms of the discussion were the relative merits and costs of different forms of partitioning, weighed against the

need for security. The recurrent nature of break-ins and vandalism were, and still are, one of the taken-for-granted aspects of working there. The style of the discussion was one which was outside my previous experience and which I therefore found particularly interesting. What impressed me was the lack of a sense of competing claims to scarce resources being argued out. Instead there was evidently an implicit assumption that all parties to the discussion had legitimate rights to a certain form of accomodation, and that it was the business of the meeting to find the best workable compromise. The question which was addressed was what contribution each party could make. The main note of dissent came from the councillor who argued that there was no point in putting any money into restructuring the building when it was likely to be closed in six months time. This view was strongly attacked, particularly by Ruth and the school teacher, invoking comments such as, 'The future has never been certain, we need to continue as if it was', 'We have no way of knowing how things will work out, but we do have to function now', and, 'We had only ten months to run when I arrived two years ago!'.

At this point I began to feel uncomfortable about staying any longer in the meeting. A number of people had left and the discussion reduced to the main 'interested parties', and I was again beginning to attract some curious glances. I was by now starting to realise that there was a limit to how far I could eavesdrop without also contributing something to the discussion. When attention was focussed on Women's Centre issues I could use my experience in Greystone as a contribution but in this instance I had nothing parallel to draw on and decided it was better to leave at this point.

A few weeks later I returned to do my first rota session. This time I was met with a much warmer welcome. In my absence one of the women who was active in the Centre and who also worked part-time at the

university had been talking to other women about her enthusiasm for the ideas expressed at a seminar in which we both participated.[2] By this means I acquired the beginnings of a viable identity within the setting which I could develop. In other words, by receiving this kind of endorsement from Wendy, who was already accepted in the setting, I gained a greater degree of acceptance myself.

When I talked to Wendy about her own interest in the Centre she told me she had been interested in the idea from the start, but had stayed away because she had 'got the message that they didn't want too many 'middle-class intellectuals' around'. However, eventually she did start to work in the Centre and found that there were 'plenty of other middle-class women there'. Wendy is perhaps a little unusual in that she had a clear idea of how she thought the Centre ought to operate, although she probably did not push these ideas very hard, describing herself as 'someone who made suggestions and waited for others to pick up on them'. What she did do was to go on the rota with two women because she felt neither of them were really able to cope on their own. She also considered these two as a poor match for each other - each needing a kind of support which the other would not be able to provide. In this respect she saw her own input as spending time talking to them, and in particular getting one of them interested in reading. In terms of the general orientation of the Centre she was especially doubtful about the value of drop-in sessions, i.e. where the women on the rota waited for someone to come in with a problem or a project. She felt that the low level of drop-in meant that more often than not the women who were there were sitting around chatting aimlessly, with

2. One fruitful development from this initial contact was the creation of a Feminist Research Group at Warwick. This provided a focus, across disciplinary boundaries, for the exchange of views and perspectives on research which had not existed before. My involvement in this network has been an important reference point throughout the research process.

the inevitable resultant boredom. Instead, she thought that there should be some kind of group activity going on as an end in itself, from which someone could take time out to deal with the occasional drop-in.

Certainly, while I had been in the Centre no one had 'dropped-in', and I agreed with her that this sitting around could not be sufficient activity in itself to maintain the interest of women who were using the Centre. Wendy instanced the difference between the two groups which were meeting at this time; the women and health group, which she described as 'positively doing something', and the single parents' group which had no specific aim beyond one of mutual support. There was a tension between these two groups over the use of the creche which was run by the single parents' group, but whose existence was assumed by the women and health group. I discovered that there was no overlap of membership between these two groups, and it appeared that in this situation a perceived hierarchy existed between those who were 'working' and those who saw themselves in a subordinate, service role. However, these tensions were never fully articulated or explored. At the first meetings of 1982 an announcement was made which overshadowed everything else.

Ruth told the meeting that for some time the accounts of the Project had been kept very badly and the auditors had now discovered that some £4,000 was unaccounted for. The Project was declared bankrupt, and Ruth emphasised that from that day it was not possible to do <u>anything</u>, indeed there was some doubt as to whether the workers would receive their salaries. They were waiting to hear if the Urban Aid grant was going to be renewed, but there was little likelihood that there would be any firm news about this until March. Having received, but not apparently digested, this news, the meeting moved on to the now perennial question of room changes and partitions, and threatened to

become bogged down there, to the extent that Ruth had to remind the meeting that there was no money at all. Nevertheless, it was decided that we wanted to move to a room at the front of the building, and it then became a matter of deciding how best to tell the other groups in the Project of this decision. Ruth advised that it would be politically inexpedient to raise the matter at the full Project meeting that evening, which was bound to be extremely stressful. Instead Wendy and another woman decided they would have a 'chat' with one of the teachers in the school the next day.

In view of the financial crisis there was inevitably some discussion of fundraising. My field notes record my astonishment at the small sums of money which were apparently being taken seriously; there was about twenty pounds in the kitty, and the kind of fund-raising being contemplated was in the nature of jumble sales and other similar events. On the other hand I was impressed by the extent of knowledge of other agencies in the community who were known to acknowledge the value of the Project, and who could therefore be lobbied for support. Even more surprisingly, to me, three weeks later the Centre had been re-established in the old school room and it indeed seemed, as one woman remarked, as if it had always been there, while the problem over the bankruptcy had been sufficiently worked out so that the Project was secure for another year at least.

The next meeting, then, was a time for a reappraisal of how things were going and how energies might be directed in the future. The two inter-related issues around which the discussion centred were the position of Ruth, as the community worker and how her percieved and reported preferences might be incorporated into the Centre's organisation, and specifically on the matter of organisation, whether it should continue to be run on a rota basis, and if so, what particular form of it whould be adopted. Ruth had started to run a

workshop for the new playgroup on the same afternoon and it was decided, with only minimal discussion, that these meetings should be moved to an afternoon when she was free to attend. There was more discomfort about the effect of her permanent position which differentiated her from the other workers. It was realised that most of the 'drop-ins' were women who came specifically to see her, both because she could provide a continuity which was impossible for individual session workers, and, more obviously, because she was far more likely to be the person they encountered on any initial visit. The result of this was that the women who did do session work felt themselves to be out of touch with what was going on and to some extent, that within this format their presence was superfluous. However, in spite of this, and also considering Ruth's reported remark that she, 'didn't believe in rotas', most of the women at the meeting were persuaded that there should be specific cover in the Women's Room at various times in the week.

The arguments here were in terms of the importance for women coming in for the first time of a reliable and welcoming reception, recognising that it took some effort and courage to enter a new environment for the first time, whether or not they were seeking help, and that any subsequent involvement might depend on how they had first been received. Additionally, I felt it was important for these women to restate the value of the rota system, since for them giving up time to this activity was the one simple and unequivocal demonstration of their commitment and involvement which was available to them.

With this re- establishment of the Centre in mind the list of contacts was examined, and it was realised that a substantial number of women who had originally been active in the Centre were no longer coming in, either because they had got jobs or for some other reason - sometimes unknown, otherwise diagnosed as 'lack of interest', or

'involved with something else'. It was evident that more women needed to be attracted in anda new wave of publicity was suggested. This simple solution did not, however, make it clear just what exactly newcomers were to be attracted to. At this point the women in the meeting started to share their feelings about working on the rota and these were almost entirely negative. They described the activity as 'boring - I'm ready to tear my hair out', 'a waste of time', and 'superfluous'. These remarks triggered a reiteration of Wendy's view that rota sessions should not consist of one or two women sitting around waiting for something to happen, but rather of a larger group actively engaged in doing something. Although this idea appeared to have some merit, there was already sufficient experience in this meeting to recognise that there were likely to be other outcomes besides the overt one of reducing boredom. The groups which had already become established in this way, such as the women and health group, developed largely autonomous identities and maintained only low levels of communication with the Women's Centre group. Thus, on balance, the effect was to reduce the number of women whose primary interest was in the Centre, rather than increase it. Another difficulty was evident in the amount of resentment expressed towards an appropriate (unemployed young women) but 'outside' group which had started using the room two afternoons a week. The resentment arose because the arrangement had been presented as a fait accompli without consultation, but it could equally be seen that if this group had arisen 'inside', then its intentions and the need for accommodation would already have been aired in the policy meetings and the need for consultation would not have appeared in the same form. The resentment was eventually talked through, and it was accepted that there were at present insufficient women to mount a full rota, and that the young women's group was the sort of activity which should be going on anyway.

This discussion goes a fair way to encapsulating the kinds of difficulties faced by the women whose primary interest was in operating a Women's Centre. They were being effectively squeezed between the full-time worker whose availability meant that she dealt with the bulk of the individual problem-centred work, and the growth of the increasingly autonomous issue-based group work. What role was left to them in this situation remained unclear. The meeting broke up recognising that we had not really started talking about what should be done, and one woman enjoined us to come next time 'full of dynamic ideas'. In spite of the sometimes difficult issues addressed at this meeting, I was impressed by how easy it seemed to be to talk in a way which allowed disagreements to be expressed in a form which did not intrude on the relaxed atmosphere. For myself, I now felt comfortable and relaxed in the setting. Still, as I left, I was wondering how to understand why those women did come to meetings; at that time I did not really recognise the importance of creating and maintaining the kind of setting where those kinds of interchanges were possible and valuable in themselves.

4. Redefining My Position

Over the next couple of months there were a number of occurrences which led me to question and re-examine my role within the situation. The facts that I now felt comfortable in meetings (as I have just described), and that I was welcomed and drawn into discussions had seemed enough; and I assumed that I had by now worked out a role which would allow me the kind of access I wanted until I considered I had accumulated as much field work data as I thought was useful. When this point was reached I would withdraw. During February and March of 1982 I was made to realise that such a static relationship with the other women in the Centre was not really acceptable to them.

The first indication I had of this was when I mentioned (in passing, I thought) that I was thinking of coming to live in Whitefield. This brought a strong response from Ruth who said, 'Yes, come and join us. Stop sitting on the fence'. The postponed discussion about what the Centre should be doing followed. Ruth first stated her position, which was that she was inevitably going to be the main source of continuity as no one else was going to be there for much of the time, and that she saw no way of overcoming the difficulties of communication between volunteers, especially in a case where a personal problem had been gone into in some depth. I then said that I had decided that I was no longer prepared to do session work because of the amount of time spent sitting around, together with the unpredictable occurrence of 'heavy problems'. As soon as I said this I was met with the accusation, 'You didn't say all this before', and I was asked if I had done much session work. This surprised me very much. Although I was drawing on my experience in Greystone Women's Centre, I had assumed all along that they would have at least as much experience as I had, and that therefore any contribution I might make would add nothing to the sum of knowledge. Apparently this was not the way others saw it, and I was being reprimanded for withholding information. My view was still being sought and so I continued by saying that I thought it would be a pity if enthusiasm was dissipated through inactivity on rota sessions.

One woman suggested that it would be a good idea to mount a campaign against dangerous play equipment in the local parks, and again I was faced with the slightly accusatorial, 'You would support that, wouldn't you?'. Certainly, this was something which I would have agreed that I felt strongly about, and yet this feeling was at a level which fell short of translation into action.

Here it is appropriate to describe the kinds of activities which typically follow from a decision to 'mount a campaign'. The trigger

in this case was two women with young children who felt strongly about the poor state of the local play equipment. They therefore intended to spend time surveying and photographing its faults, writing to the local council and the press and, by leafleting and other means, to encourage other women to join with them in this. The dilemma I was faced with on this and similar issues was how far I could accede to the pressures to allocate my time in a similar way to them. I was very aware how time-consuming (and, as I saw them, boring) these activities were. I had reckoned that by attending meetings I would be making the optimum balance between data collection and time invested, and I did not feel that the other considerable demands on my time could allow it to be otherwise. In this instance I was muted in my support for the campaign and did not join in any of the work it involved. However I was now recognising the likelihood of having to rethink this position if I was to maintain credibility in the situation.

Over the next few months I allowed myself to be drawn gradually into the setting. Looking back this seems to be due in some part to my decision to move to Whitefield. Although I talked about the research I was doing whenever it seemed appropriate, I think it was still difficult for the other women to understand why I was a regular attender at meetings when I was not involved in the local area in the same way as they were. Ruth was particularly vocal in her enthusiasm for my move and when, by pure chance, it turned out that I was moving into the house where Jill had been living she made sure as many people as possible were aware of this. Thus, I believe this increased identification with the locality was an important part of my gradually increased access and legitimacy. At the same time I experienced an increasing amount of enjoyment from attending meetings. This is not to say that there were not times when I would have chosen not to have gone if I had not defined my attendance as 'work' but, once there, I found

I was obtaining benefits from the pleasant atmosphere in addition to the simple instrumentality of data collection.

5. The Women's Centre and the Project

The relationship between the Women's Centre and the rest of the Project remained in a state of uneasy accommodation - a continuation of the situation described on page 142. It was slow to gain full acceptance, as Ruth described.

> Every now and again I have to sit and defend the existence of the Women's Centre at various meetings. Not so much now, but in the summer things were difficult because it was quiet. Anything else is allowed a quiet period - the youth club is closed altogether - but the Women's Centre dare not be quiet.

Beside this need to justify and provide evidence of the Women's Centre's activities, the room itself was frequently broken into and had things stolen from it. It was obvious that Ruth bore the brunt of this kind of incident, and it was also evident that sometimes all the available energy was consumed by the effort of maintaining some kind of status quo.

At the end of March 1982 the news came that an Urban Aid grant of £40,000 had been made to the Project, but shortly after this the local council (as the grant's administering body) announced its refusal to release the money until the Project's financial irregularities were in some way sorted out. For a short time Ruth and some of the other workers did not receive their salaries and continued to work while claiming unemployment benefit. The difficulties of trying to work in these circumstances, together with the fact that, even when the money was released, the Urban Aid grant was only for one year, led to the first suggestion that the Women's Centre should actively begin seeking separate premises and independent funding. From this point on there was increasingly a distinction drawn between the Women's Room, as situated in the Project's building and the proposed independent Women's Centre. Although it was not possible to establish this Centre in the

course of the fieldwork, a steering group was set up to work towards this end. While some of the steering group's meetings were held in the Women's Room, a great many also took place in private houses and by the end of the research, after an initial period of confusion, it was clear that the steering group was operating as a quite separate entity. To a considerable extent this position was urged on the group by Ruth. A close association between the Project and an independent Women's Centre was considered politically inexpedient in terms of the problems it might cause in the management of the Project's relationship with the local council. The membership of the Management Committee of the Project included a number of district and local councillors some of whom could be described as at best reluctantly sympathetic to the aims of the Project. As a result of this there was a general feeling that it was necessary to restrict the work of the Project in ways which would keep it within the bounds of acceptability - or, at least, appear to do so (see page 142). In this context the notion of an independent Women's Centre was seen as too 'political' and too radical to be accommodated within the Project. It is, however, important to point out that the clear analytical distinction which developed between the two enterprises was very much 'in name only'. While there was considerable overlap of membership, everyone who was involved knew and accepted the need for this distinction, and thus colluded in maintaining the public face.

The first meeting which was called to implement this new structure took place in April 1982. It was widely advertised and attended by more than thirty women. The following minutes were circulated afterwards:

> There was a very high attendence which was enccuraging, but made discussion a bit difficult. We talked at some length about the role of the Women's Centre, in theory and practice, and about our relationship with the Project. The following points finally emerged:

1. That the Women's Centre should work toward independence from the Project. The fact that (the Director of Social Services) has finally decided to release the Urban Aid grant means we can take time and care over this.
2. That we will need full-time workers to function properly - one of whom should speak one or more Asian languages.
3. That we will need alternative premises, preferably a shop front, and preferably central.
4. A working party was set up to look into the mechanics of the above, (fund-raising, Manpower Services Commission, insurance, legal status).
5. That Friday's meeting should be repeated monthly, every third Friday in the Women's Centre.
6. This meeting should not replace the Monday afternoon policy meetings.

One woman I spoke to afterwards felt that in spite of the high turnout there was a low level of energy in the meeting so that, while there was considerable enthusiasm for the idea of an independent Women's Centre, there was an embarrassing lack of willingness to take on the work involved. Notwithstanding item 6 in the minutes, in the month between this meeting and the next the Monday afternoon meetings ceased simply because no one came to them. I arrived one Monday afternoon and found the place deserted.

About twenty women came to the May meeting, but I noticed that more than half of them made no contribution to the discussion and it was reported that only four women had met to form the steering group. I found the proceedings of this meeting almost farcical. In response to accusations that she was too much 'in charge' Ruth was being deliberately non-directive, and had failed to prepare an agenda as she usually did. One member of the steering group continually tried to get a discussion of the draft constitution going, but as no one was prepared to read the draft out to the meeting this initiative failed. The steering group had written to a number of other Women's Centres asking them about their experiences of getting started, but so far they had not received any replies. It became apparent that most of the useful information in the meeting resided with Linda and myself as

a result of our experience with Greystone Women's Centre. The range of alternative structures which was being explored at this point was very wide and included charitable status, a limited company and a co-operative. Much of the meeting was taken up with a confused and fragmentary attempt to convey and discuss the limited information which was available about the various financial arrangements, and to assess the implications for political activity which each structure embodied. I was surprised by the lack of general knowledge about such matters as Manpower Services Commission schemes and the availability of free legal advice; in the case of the latter the fact that it was available within the Project was not known by some people.

Although the meeting was having difficulty coming to grips with the problem of adopting an existing organisational structure, there was a strong consensus about some aspects of a projected 'ideal' structure. It was felt to be essential that this should include at least two paid workers; the experience that had accumulated so far indicated that, with the best will in the world, it was impossible to avoid the situation where information and responsibility, and hence direction, devolved to the paid worker or workers. Thus, while two paid workers would fall short of a wholly ideal situation it was important to state this as a minimum; the prevailing view was that there would be meaningful differences in a structure which was headed by two workers rather than one. One woman offered this version of the optimum situation.

> In an ideal situation, if voluntary work was being used, then it should all be voluntary work. Or, in an absolutely ideal situation, nobody would not be paid for it.

The drive was towards finding the most egalitarian solution possible; the constraints were those of finding funding for this structure or of attracting and maintaining voluntary workers. With this aim of considering how best to spread the work over a number of women the rota

system was discussed again. This time it was dismissed totally - 'people wouldn't be committed enough, and things wouldn't get done' - and attention turned to trying to understand why women weren't coming into the Centre. There seemed to be two images (almost stereotypes) of the kind of women who could be using the Centre, but weren't. These were 'the bored housewife', seen as someone who would benefit from involvement, and 'the busy person', who was seen as someone who could contribute a lot, but was not seeing the Centre as an appropriate place to direct their energy. In this context there was criticism from two women from the university about the amount of publicity material displayed on campus, which they considered very inadequate. Once again any suggestion that more work was necessary (in whatever area) brought the discussion back to the notion of 'commitment', that is a willingness to redirect one's time and energy in a particular direction. This idea is an important one for understanding the nature of work in the Women's Centre and is illustrated by the discussion which followed. The accusation from the university women drew attention to the large amount of work in some areas which brought a relatively small return. For the last meeting, apart from the general publicity, a number of women's groups in the locality had been contacted individually, and they had turned up for that meeting, but had not reappeared tonight. The dismissal of the rota system at this time was in the same vein; it was hard to see how women who were not at present coming into the Centre could be appealed to in such a way that they would feel willing to make a commitment to it.

Ruth did her best to lighten the depressing atmosphere by drawing the meeting's attention back to the present, and to the fact that, '<u>We're</u> here because of a personal and political commitment to the Women's Movement, and we need to recognise that it's a slow process to get people involved. There needs to be a lot more going on here for

people to be attracted into it.' This last statement really does sum up the central dilemma. For more to be going on there must be more work by those who can already be described as 'committed', and this realisation carries with it a sense of obligation - that in some sense one should want to spend some of one's time promoting the activities of the Women's Centre. But for whom? When I discussed this meeting afterwards with Linda she felt that it was not being recognised that you couldn't establish a Women's Centre because there ought to be one, but that it could only work if the people involved felt comfortable in what they were doing and gained something they valued in terms of personal satisfaction out of what they were doing.

Ruth announced that she would be prepared to open the Centre on Saturday mornings if someone would cover for her occasionally. This suggestion did not arise in response to anything said in the meeting, but presumably came from her own decision to invest this additional time in the hope of attracting women who were not able to take advantage of the present opening hours.

As a postscript to this meeting it must be recorded that the estimated time for achieving the goal of an independent Women's Centre was nine months. This has still not been achieved at the time of writing (January 1986).

6. The Slow Road to Independence

For the remainder of the period of the field work these monthly Friday meetings continued to be the main forum for debate and exchange of information. The steering group was established as one of the several groups which brought news of its progress to the meeting and invited discussion of any preoccupying issues. There was now a clear distinction between the Women's Room and the Women's Centre, but it must be remembered that there was considerable overlap of personnel and

that therefore this distinction must be understood contextually. That is to say, there were occasions where it was not really clear which group was operating, or when it was neither of these two groups but another, perhaps temporary, group of women. A meeting was the context in which a group was defined, and interspersed in time with these meetings were numerous other groupings of greater or lesser formality which drew their members from the same larger group of women. This fluid and flexible approach to organising activity meant, as I was beginning to realise, that keeping track of the relevant issues involved a more flexible approach than simply attending the 'relevant' meetings.

By June the size of the meeting had dwindled still further. The steering group was still very much at the 'finding out' stage and had become a relatively minor item on the agenda, as opposed to taking up the bulk of the meeting as it had done on the two previous occasions. Instead, perhaps reflecting the time of year, attention was directed towards other activities - a stall at the local Peace Festival, an unofficial float in the town's summer carnival and the first edition of a newsletter. All these activities shared the characteristics of being fun in themselves and a good form of publicity. The Peace Festival stall collected a large number of names and addresses, and the newsletter contained a diary of local and national events, while the float in the carnival (of women and children dressed as suffragettes) demonstrated the Centre's existence in a rather incongruous setting.

The other side to this increased level of activity was less enjoyable, but necessary if the present structure was to persist, in that increased levels of communication and administration were needed to service it. The next two meetings I attended showed clearly the conflicts and confusions which arose when these functions were not given sufficient attention. In July, at the usual starting time of

8 p.m. only Ruth and I had arrived. She was clearly fed up and remarked, 'If no one comes we can go home'. Other women did arrive, but slowly, and it was almost nine o'clock by the time people had finished arriving. The main matters for discussion were the report of the steering group and the allocation of the profits from the Peace Festival stall, and in both cases the discussion was acrimonious and personal. A lot of time was taken up with talk about who might be coming, who should be there, and speculation about why they weren't. To me it didn't feel at all like a 'general' meeting in that only those with specific interests were present (and several who were deemed to come into this category were noticeably absent).

The Peace Festival stall had been a joint venture between the Women's Centre and the Rape Crisis Centre. Initially the allocation of the profits had been to pay off the printing bill and divide the remainder equally between the two groups. The amounts involved were not large - the printing bill was £40 and the remainder £16 - but this division was unacceptable to the Rape Crisis group who argued that they had done less printing and were also claiming the money made from selling hand-made dolls. As presented, the claim sounded unilateral and non-negotiable, but in fact it was simply one woman reporting the sense of a meeting which had taken place some time ago. Ruth announced at this point that she was tired of making decisions and wanted the meeting to do it. The difficulty here was that there was no separate Women's Centre bank account, and at present all money was being channelled through a community work account which Ruth had access to. An indication of the confusion which existed is shown by the remark of one woman - that she had been trying to pay a bill for some time, but could get no one to take the cheque.

This confusion over the bank accounts of different groups is an indicator of the lack of clarity in the relationship between different

groups. It has already been pointed out that overlapping membership of groups was common; what was unclear here was whether the Women's Centre was to be seen as some kind of umbrella organisation to the various other groups, or whether it was separate and distinct from them. More precisely, the women at the meeting were making statements from which it could be deduced that they themselves were unclear as to which capacity they were working in (as, for example, when making the dolls). Probably this ambiguity could be contained without difficulty all the time there was no money involved, but the question of the ownership of the money brought another set of considerations into play. A way out of the present dilemma which was suggested was that the Women's Centre should make a donation of £5 to Rape Crisis, 'As it was a good cause, and we haven't made a donation yet this year', but that in the future there needed to be much more awareness of the separation of expenses.

The report of the steering group to this meeting consisted of a summary of their proposed application for charitable status, and a general statement of their aims, 'For anyone who might want a statement'. Much of the report, I felt, was good, but there were other parts which I found exceedingly naive and over-optimistic. I was by now realising that I did have some information which might be of value if I joined the steering group, but which seemed of too specific a nature to raise at a general meeting. As it was I found the discussion rambling, unfocussed and repetitive, and I was surprised that it was possible to go on talking round the same issue apparently indefinitely.

This sense that the Women's Centre project was becoming bogged-down and losing impulsion was further conveyed in an article which appeared in the newsletter towards the end of the summer. After outlining the story so far it went on to say:

> These great plans led to the decision to hold monthly meetings . . . at which new ideas could be discussed and the progress of the steering group be reported. However,

> recently the number of women attending both these meetings has dwindled. Those of us in the steering group feel that unless more women are prepared to actively participate there is no point in continuing. We are therefore appealing to all women who are interested and want to see a Women's Centre here, to come along to the monthly meetings or, better still come along to the steering group.

At the September meeting the lack of enthusiasm was evident. What now seemed to be the normal state prevailed; people arrived very slowly, old ground was covered and recovered, and there was considerable reluctance to volunteer for anything but plenty of protestations about lack of ability or knowledge. The latest report on constitutional progress fell into a pool of awkward silence. Such discussion as there was was in terms of trying to make sense of unfamiliar organisational structures. Thus when the qualifying conditions for, for example, charitable status were examined, it always gave rise to a need to affirm that 'we' would not have to conform to the prescriptions of chairperson, treasurer, and so on in anything other than name; if someone did take on one of these posts it would not really mean they were any different from anyone else. The discussion rarely progressed beyond this point. The difficulty of building a bridge between the formal structures embodied in the constitutional alternatives and the relatively non-hierarchical proceedings in these meetings made it hard to move on to examine the merits and demerits of the various schemes in any other terms.

Afterwards, in a pub, a woman who had come to talk about a specific item (a jewellery-making workshop) asked whether these meetings were always so 'dead'. The conversation this question sparked-off showed that most people felt that there was too much explaining and recovering of ground, but because it was not generally known what the smaller groups were doing, there was really no other way of doing it. The various justifications offered for this were that it prevented everything resting on a few people, that it was a way of

transmitting information, and that it gave women a chance to get involved with what was going on. I suggested that they might be like that because there was always a different mix of women there, but it was pointed out to me that nobody ever said much in meetings and yet they were all chatting away now. Finally Ruth remarked, 'They're business meetings, they have to be that way', and that seemed to be the end of it.

Conversations I had around this time confirmed the fact that the steering group was near to disintegration. One of its most active members was moving away and it had not attracted any new members. On the other hand, opening the Women's Room on Saturdays had been a success and it was much busier than usual. These two facts are likely to have some interrelation; at that time the Women's Room was functioning as the main focus of activity in the town, leaving little spare energy for another venture. While this was the case it was possible to take for granted the existence of space, equipment, and Ruth herself, thus diminishing the felt need for a separate Women's Centre. At less energetic times the negative aspects such as the frequent break-ins and the limited space came to prominence and pointed to the wish for autonomy. However, soon after this, the vision of a more ideal situation was reactivated when shop-front premises in exactly the right position became available. These were in the same part of town as the Project's building and next door to a community bookshop. This was a sufficiently appealing prospect to trigger a new enthusiasm for action. A concerted fund-raising campaign was mounted and a large number of letters of appeal were sent out. This resulted in a substantial sum of money being raised through donations, standing orders and loans, but things were moving too fast at this point and the lease was sold to another enterprise before sufficient money could be raised. Nevertheless this flurry of activity had value in itself

since the extended publicity increased the visibility of the Women's Centre project, and the accumulation of resources served to increase the reality level of the enterprise to those who were working on it. The momentum which was generated by this persisted for some time, and was further fired by the news of another suitable building. Early in 1983 this article appeared in the newsletter:

> Before Christmas we tried to rent the property next to (the bookshop) but we couldn't get enough money quickly enough. We're still working on the problem of funding and have managed to raise nearly £400 - which is great and we cannot thank people enough for their donations, loans, etc. We still need money, of course, plus a regular source of income through standing orders. We have just heard about a house in High Street which will become vacant in July and then let by the Council (we believe to a deserving community organisation - could this be us?!) On the face of it it seems absolutely ideal for a Women's Centre and we are in the process of finding out from the Council just what the situation is. We desperately need more women with energy and ideas and money and endless patience and . . .

I decided that (whether or not I fitted the criteria) I would start attending the steering group meetings.

The first meeting did indeed underline the need for more women in the group, since on this occasion there were only two others besides myself. I found later that this was somewhat atypical, and that a more usual number was five or six participants. The main topic at this meeting was fund raising, with the particular emphasis on the problem of how to go about things. The group had already written to a number of other Women's Centres and to the National Women's Enquiry Service, but not all these letters had been answered and those that had contained little in the way of useful information. One woman remarked that the relevant experience must exist, but that it was not easy to get hold of. I felt that the poor response to the letters was likely to be because any 'relevant experience' would feel both particular and diffuse to those who were in possession of it. The difficulty of conveying this to an unknown group would probably be sufficiently

inhibiting to preclude this taking place. With this in mind I offered to invite Jo to talk to the group about her experience of fund raising in Greystone. This meeting took place a few weeks later and proved extremely useful. Somewhat to her surprise Jo found she could draw on a considerable store of knowledge which was generalisable, and the steering group was heartened by evidence that it was possible to transform ideas into a concrete reality. The main points which Jo felt it important to convey, on the basis of her experience, were:

1) The need to be political - that is, to lobby and to 'go to the top'.

2) In terms of funding agencies to approach - 'to go for the big one'.

3) The style of the enterprise - 'don't replicate existing services'.

4) Have more than just one or two paid workers.

However, since the time when Greystone Women's Centre had received substantial funding from one of the Cadbury trusts, the growth of the Manpower Services Commission schemes meant that it was more difficult to obtain funding from charitable bodies if application had not already been made for government money. The low rates of pay offered in these schemes meant that they were far from ideal, but after much discussion the steering group decided they had no alternative but to apply for funding to the MSC. In the spring of 1983 there was a new wave of enthusiasm for meetings and the membership of the group increased. Wendy, who had been active in the Centre in the past, was now working for the MSC and she was able to pass on her knowledge of the details of the various schemes. The group also worked to produce job specifications and project proposals and in all the prevailing mood felt very different from the gloom which had surrounded the earlier discussions of constitutional matters. The possibility of finding

premises and the conversations with Women's Centre and MSC workers, together with the successful first attempts at fund raising, all served to increase the belief that it was possible to reach the desired goal. This in turn provided a stimulus to further activity.

One form this extra activity took was the arranging of a week of events and exhibitions to celebrate international women's day. My involvement in this was not great and most of the occurrences fall outside the scope of this account. However, once again there was an overlap of membership between the various groups of women working on this and on the Women's Centre project. This produced some problems and a meeting was set up specifically to discuss how the steering group collective was working - in fact to discuss what collective working was. The trigger for the meeting came from difficulties and unpleasantness which arose over the hire of some disco equipment and which one woman (Polly) felt she had had to deal with on her own. The meeting had already been postponed from the previous evening because too many women had pleaded other engagements and Lesley, in particular, was angry that the re-drafting of the MSC proposal, scheduled for that meeting, had not been done and argued that it should be done now. She was also angry at the number of 'half' meetings which were taking place - meaning both those where only half the membership turned up, so that items of business were repeated when absentees returned, and those, like this one, which were squeezed into the first half of the evening and did not allow enough time for something as substantial as rewriting a proposal. Polly, on the other hand, would not allow this to go ahead until her feelings about being left on her own and unable to rely on other women were dealt with. These disputes developed into a more general discussion about the nature of commitment. More particularly, the visible demonstrations of commitment in terms of attending meetings and taking on tasks outside the meetings was the important issue. There

was general acknowledgement that everyone was 'too busy', that there were too many meetings, especially at the moment, and that overlapping membership gave rise to confusions and conflations of interest which were not being properly dealt with. Lesley announced that she knew who she was in each group, to which Polly rejoined, 'I just think of you as Lesley'. In other words, Lesley was giving primacy to the purpose of each group, and distinguished between them by this means, whereas Polly was seeing essentially the same group of women doing a number of different things.

The same lack of separation was evident with the finances of 'Women's Week' and the Women's Centre. 'Women's Week' was supposed to be self-financing, but setting it up involved an outlay of money which was 'borrowed' from the Women's Centre funds. Janet, who was holding the cheque book, was also worried about the individualisation of responsibility. She asked, 'What do I do when people ask me for a float? How do I know it's going to be repaid?'. The other women at the meeting were unanimous that this should not be her problem, but that when something like this happened it should be brought to the group - in effect, the decision was not hers to make. However, the fact that such misunderstandings were occurring did point to the need to examine the assumptions underlying the way the collective worked. Angela had obviously spent some time thinking about this issue, and she described her assessment of the ideal situation as one in which individuals should take responsibility for tasks, but not feel that they have to carry it all themselves. It must be possible to ask for help. Equally, there should be an assumption that others will do what they say they will do, and this implied the existence of a level of trust which was currently lacking. The other symptom of the malaise which she identified was the poor quality of communication. The minutes were repeating the same items week after week, since without full

attendance 'decisions' made by a sub-set of the steering group were not made known to the absentees, so that when a different sub-set met the same items appeared on the agenda. The solution proposed here was that meetings should take place on a regular day (probably once a fortnight) which would have the advantage of predictability. This, the group hoped, would increase the likelihood of having 'proper meetings'. There was, fortunately, still enough goodwill and enthusiasm for the project for this to be accepted. Meetings took on a greater regularity and were more focussed in their attention.

The first draft of the proposal for an MSC scheme was extremely ambitious and wide-ranging. It suggested employing ten workers and covered education, health issues, counselling, a resource centre and library, craft work, child care provision, campaigning and coordination with other women's groups in the town. While I think everyone recognised that there was an element of wishful thinking in such a grand design, it seemed important to make a statement about the ideal state of the world even if it was subsequently cut down to a more realistic size. Continuing the process of translating ideas into reality led me to invite a woman I knew who was working with MSC schemes in another town to share her experience with the steering group. She was able to draw attention to problem areas which the steering group had not so far considered. These are described in the following extract from Janet's minutes:

> - What sort of women do we envisage for jobs?
> We have been very ambitious in our plans, envisaging women like ourselves taking on the jobs. It is very likely that this would not be the case. Martha explained that many of the MSC workers they have had, having been unemployed for long periods of time, lack faith in their own ambitions, want lots of guidance, and lack 'people skills'. Certainly in a year, if it is a 'good' project, these people can get something out of an MSC job, but Martha was quite doubtful about how much they can help others, i.e. take on the type of roles our job descriptions include.

- Supervision.
We discussed the issue of supervision. We explained that we did not want to set up a hierarchical structure with some women in charge of others. Martha seemed to appreciate this, but in view of the points above about MSC workers she said she had found that workers wanted and needed quite close supervision and guidance. Additionally this needs to be given by someone who is available all the time. We talked about the difficulties of the collective taking on this role.

- Number of workers.
Martha thought our plan was very ambitious and that ten workers was probably too many. She mentioned practical problems like arranging a time when they could all meet together to discuss the project. She felt that perhaps we were assuming that MSC workers would be as able and prepared to put in as much time and energy as many women do voluntarily at the moment, e.g. late evenings, attending meetings in non-work time.

- Steering group/collective.
We talked a bit about this and what its role would be. Clearly a strong collective is needed if you are taking the responsibility of employing workers.

In the aftermath of this meeting the steering group decided to reduce the number of workers to five (since this would allow exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975) and to apply for funding under the Voluntary Projects Programme rather than the Community Programme. This had the advantage of offering rather better rates of pay and was less subject to censure from unions (whose approval is necessary for a scheme to go forward). It also appeared to fit the style of a Women's Centre better, as the basis of the scheme is that workers are employed to encourage and facilitate voluntary activity. Things were moving forward. The next big effort was to try to persuade the council that we were the right community group to take up the tenancy of the house in High Street.

This decision was to be made at a meeting of the Land and Buildings sub-committee at the end of July. To gain publicity the steering group arranged a meeting with a local newspaper and the following article appeared on July 14th, 1983:

Campaign women set sights on likely HQ

Women in Whitefield are carpaigning to get their own centre in the town. They say there is a need for a place where women can meet to form self-help groups, attend training sessions or use as an informal social centre.
The Women's Centre Planning Group has been raising funds and gathering support for about two years. But now they say they have found the ideal location for the Centre in High Street.
Several local organisations and charities have applied to take over the listed building which has been empty since the end of June. And the Women's Centre Planning Group is lobbying councillors and plans to submit a petition with more than 900 signatures to show there is support for the scheme.
They say that evening classes run at traditional colleges are often at the wrong time for women with children.
And they hope to provide a vital service for Asian women who are often reluctant to attend courses in subjects such as adult literacy where the classes are mixed.
The women say with unemployment hitting women particularly hard there is a pool of untapped skills which could be developed if there was a centre to generate activities.
'We are liasing with other organisations to make sure that we do not duplicate activities and many of them have been very encouraging', said an organiser. 'There are so many women who are unemployed and who have skills and enthusiasm but can't get jobs and have nowhere to go.'

Even making allowance for the journalistic style, there was one particular inaccuracy in the report. In fact there were only two other applicants for the tenancy; one of these, from an acupuncturist, could be discounted because it was not a community project, the other was from a local language society.

The lobbying of the councillors took the form of sending them an initial letter and following this up with a phone call asking them if they would like any further information. Janet did most of this work, and her reception was not very encouraging.

> Councillor A (vice chairman) did not want to see us; Councillor B (chairman) asked a few questions about the project on the phone and explained about the different committees the decision would go to. He was quite pleasant but said he didn't think he needed to see us. Councillor C advised us to 'lay off a bit' - pushing our case too much. He said he didn't need any more information from us. Councillor D's reaction was much the same, though he did say he'd re-read the material we've sent him and he'll let us know if he needs any more information. Councillor E agreed to meet us at the town hall for just half an hour. So far we have not been able to contact Councillor F.

There was only one woman member of this sub-committee and she was the only one who showed any real enthusiasm for the project. She herself was particularly keen on the area of women's health, and in this respect she was quite supportive, but she also said she was not hopeful about the way the proposal would be received by the men on the sub-committee. It turned out to be a close run thing. The voting was five to four in favour of the language society. Not long after this the council announced its own plans for an Unemployed Centre.

IV. CODA

The let-down from this disappointment after all the hard work was considerable. No one took the initiative to arrange another meeting and none took place for several weeks. Coinciding as it did with the summer holidays there appeared to be an unspoken consensus that it was necessary to give this endeavour a rest for a while and engage in other (less draining) activities. Although a lot of work had been done on the Voluntary Projects Programme proposal in terms of writing job descriptions and working out costings, the form had not been completed and sent off. This was left until Janet and I got together in September and decided that we didn't want to see so much work go to waste. The fact of actually submitting the proposal had a re-energising effect on the group. It began meeting regularly again and was strengthened by Polly who had dropped out for a time because of her academic commitments, and Linda who was able to bring useful experience from her year of working for Greystone Women's Centre. I had considered dropping out myself during the summer, feeling that perhaps enough data had been collected and that it was now an inappropriate use of my time, but in the event I stayed on for several more months and gained a great deal from the company of the other women and from spending a small amount of time working on a project which was

not my main activity. During the autumn of 1983 the group was notably stronger and more confident than it had been at any time in the past. Faced with the imminence of having to put the scheme into operation, our ideas about collectivity and non-hierarchical working received closer and more searching scrutiny than had ever been necessary before. For me this provided a useful forum to discuss the ideas which had arisen in the course of my work, but it was also evident that the process of working together, albeit intermittently, had been an important learning experience for all the women concerned.

After the Christmas break we telephoned the MSC to check on the progress of our application and were told that the scheme had been heavily over-subscribed. Our proposal would not be considered for at least four months.

V. SUMMARY

1. Organisational Movement

It has already been shown in the short case studies how different dominant stabilities - those facets of organising activity which assume a 'taken for granted' aspect - permit resources to be directed towards other areas of concern. In Whitefield we have an example of a situation where the dominant stability shows variation over time and is, in any case, less strongly marked than in the previous examples. (It is, of course, accepted that the different visibility of these processes is a product of the different strategies by which the data was obtained; long-term present-time involvement with a research setting will, inevitably, produce data of a different quality than that which is obtained by short-term association and from informants, and that therefore there is not a complete comparison between the two sets of data.) Thus, at different times:

i) the location of the Women's Centre within the Project's building was sometimes assumed (page 140), at other times the pursuit of alternative premises was a prime consumer of time and energy (pages 168, 175);

ii) the group of women operating the Centre was variously, sufficient (pp 145 - 146), insufficient (pp 153-4), inappropriate (page 145) or nonexistent (page 176);

iii) the 'task' of the Centre was sometimes clear and enacted (pages 139-140), sometimes unclear (page 154), and sometimes absent (page 176).

More generally (as noted on page 142), this variation can be seen in the different ways the activities discussed were named. In one sense it could be said that Whitefield had a Women's Centre a few months into the study period, but by the end of it, it did not. This is, however, a distortion; it is truer to say that the definition of a Women's Centre changed over time, as did the area in which that definition was enacted. To recap: Jill was reasonably certain that she had been part of setting up a Women's Centre, although the publicity material of that period also refers to a 'Women's Room' and to the planned Women's Centre within the Project. Later the proposed Women's Centre was clearly intended to exist quite separately from the Project, and the organising activity directed to this end took place within the steering group. By the end of the study period there is a degree of functional separation. The Women's Room and the community worker (Ruth) offer a background continuity and provide the bulk of the advice and support work. The steering group is narrowly directed towards seeking funding and premises and, not being tied to a physical location, is able to show periods of greater and lesser activity in response to threats and opportunities in the environment and the availability of time and energy. Events and campaigns in the area are

organised by any group of women including those who are also part of the steering group.

This functional separation raised issues of research strategy. My decision to join the steering group was motivated by the realisation that the discussions I was most interested in were not taking place exclusively in the Women's Room meetings - that increasingly they took place in other forums. It would have been possible to continue as I had begun, to spend time in the Women's Room of the Project and to monitor whatever happened there. This, I consider, would have resulted in a different piece of research. As my intention was to study the issues and activities which constitute a Women's Centre, it was necessary to follow them wherever they were enacted. This, in turn, made it necessary to achieve a higher degree of acceptance and legitimacy within the local network than might otherwise have been the case. One implication here is that, with reference to the three organisational levels outlined on page 146, the 'within Centre' level must be understood as containing the variation described above, and is more diffusely defined at the end of the study period than at the beginning. In addition, the group of women among whom the issues and activities relating to the Women's Centre were discussed and enacted was variable. This was not unexpected; however, in the absence of a fixed physical location, the movement of the Women's Centre - defined as a cluster of values and activities - is highlighted.

It follows from the 'quasi' nature of the Women's Centre, particularly in the later stages, that the need for maintenance activity is minimised. At times the group's membership was severely reduced and at other times it ceased operation altogether. This was possible because of the group's ability to reconvene or to increase its membership to some extent when required. The ebb and flow of the organisation in response to opportunities and constraints in the

environment will be discussed under (3). First, under (2), the existence of values informing the organisation of the Women's Centre at Whitefield will be examined.

2. Values: Their Espousal and Enactment

In Chapter 3, following a survey of organising activity within the women's movement, a mode of conduct with values for participation by all, the sharing of tasks and skills, and a conscious rejection of hierarchical forms was identified. Here we will look not only for evidence of these values, but also at who holds them, who enacts them, and at any problems which may result.

Initially, Jill's appointment to the post of community worker and her rejection of traditional approaches to community work was important. The version of the Women's Centre which she and Jane were able to establish (page 140) emphasised the participation of users in determining its direction, and assumed a reflexive and responsive orientation. However, while Jill had no preconceptions about who would use the Centre (page 140), it seems clear that in the main it was used by women who already had some association with feminist activity (page 139). It is interesting to note that, before Jane's intervention, Jill was unsuccessful in mobilising the support of these women (page 138). It appears that there is a meaningful difference between the 'one afternoon in the week' facility and the continual use of one room in the Project's building.

The group of women using the Centre were able to work out for themselves what the task of the Centre was, even though this is expressed by the negative, 'it wasn't like an alternative social services' (page 140). However, for Jill, as the paid worker, elements of the hierarchical structure still intruded. She was required to write occasional reports for the Management Committee and, by this

means, there was at least a theoretical limit on the degree of self-determination and autonomy the Women's Centre group could assume (page 141).

The value for non-hierarchy also seems to have affected the way in which the Centre was presented to those outside it. In particular this applied to Wendy's experience, and her decision to stay away for some time because she had heard that middle class women were not welcome (page 150). I was also informed (page 145) that it was, perhaps, not a very welcoming place. In the event neither characterisation was really borne out by our reception. A probable explanation here is that the principle of equality was invoked in the interests of attracting a 'balanced' group of women to the Centre, while in practice those who did turn up were not treated differentially. I have referred on more than one occasion (pages 146, 149, 154) to the observations I recorded about the style of the meetings. In general, the group was able to:

i) encourage and respect contributions from all participants;

ii) work towards consensus or 'win-win' solutions rather than competitive or 'win-lose' solutions; (Likert and Likert, 1976)

iii) label disagreements so that they were not interpreted as personal antagonism.

The emphasis placed on the value for participation and the skill with which it was implemented made it difficult (and unacceptable) to reject any individual woman, although, in principle, certain categories of women could be discouraged.

The general form of non-hierarchy which was adopted during this period is described in the first quotation on page 148. Here, access to the decision making processes is legitimated by being one of the women who is working in the Centre - a definition which derives from perceived levels of commitment and which does not make reference to the

class background of an individual.

This 'ideal' state was later disturbed by the loss of some members to jobs and other activities (page 148). Those who remained were faced with a difficult situation to appraise and to work out a response to (pages 152-154). The appointment of Ruth as the new community worker removed much of the individual problem-centred work from the members of the Women's Centre and left them with negative feelings about working on the rota. On the other hand, this group of women did not appear to be attracted towards a specific area of work as, for example, the women and health group, but preferred to maintain the general orientation associated with a Women's Centre. At this stage the level of affect within the group remained high, but the nature of the task which was to be associated with the stance they had adopted was uncertain. In the past working on the rota had appeared to be an appropriate task, but the experience women gained in so doing later called this approach into question.

The initiative towards setting up an independent Women's Centre (pages 159-161) was in part a response to events within the Project, and as such will be discussed under (3), but must also be seen as an attempt by participants to create a more egalitarian structure for their activities. The characteristics of an ideal solution could be identified (page 161); either no one would be paid or, preferably, everyone would be paid, but in practice it was recognised that neither state was likely to be achieved. The limits of voluntarism were well illustrated by the contrast between the number of women who were willing to attend one or two meetings in support of the idea, and the few who were prepared to devote the additional time necessary to translate this idea into action. Equally the idea of obtaining sufficient funding to pay all those who worked in the Centre was considered so unlikely as to be not worth pursuing. The acceptance that a compromise solution

was pragmatically inevitable produced, in turn, further difficulties. It appeared as though there was a need to constitute the group in some legally identifiable form and, although this was never done, a lot of discussion time was taken up with how this could be done 'on paper' while, at the same time, ensuring that the need to name a chairperson and secretary, for example, did not intrude on the way in which the group preferred to work. There was a shortage of information in many areas and, while this persisted, it was hard for members to know how to proceed.

The drop-off in attendance between the first Friday meeting and the second and subsequent ones is indicative of the difficulty of translating support for the values of the group into action, and was compounded by the lack of a clear and appropriate task at this time. The examination of the various organisational statuses, such as a limited company, which the group might adopt, was pursued (with dwindling enthusiasm) for a number of months. In fact, this activity had little relevance to the process of establishing a Women's Centre, but while the level of information in the group remained low this was not appreciated, and neither was it replaced by other more pertinent tasks. Later, access to the knowledge of women who had accumulated experience in similar areas (pages 170, 173) made it possible to formulate and pursue tasks with greater clarity and with more obvious relevance. In the meantime, the solution proposed to the immediate problem of a shortage of 'involved' women was to open the Women's Room on Saturdays. This involved a rejection of the previous 'solution' - working on the rota - which was now regarded as unworkable. The essential dilemma which confronted the group's attempts to increase its constituency is described on pp 162-3 where it is shown that, while energetic publicity can attract newcomers on a 'one-off' basis, maintaining an attractive situation involves creating one which is also

attractive and enjoyable for those presently involved.

The Saturday opening proved an effective strategy for attracting more women into the Women's Room (page 163), and, following the inputs of Jo and others, the purposiveness of the steering group increased. However, at the same time difficulties of communication and organisation were highlighted (pages 165-166). The broad constituency of women which comprised the various temporal and task-specific groupings which related in some way to the Women's Room contained many overlapping configurations and multiple relationships. The resulting confusion is illustrated by the incidents on pages 166, 171-2 where it is shown that some participants gave primacy to the task of each group and distinguished between them by their means, whereas others emphasised first their relationship with another individual, and only secondarily the context in which it was enacted. This latter stance clearly led to inefficiencies, and, in the case of the steering group, an effective solution was to focus the group through the regulation of the time and frequency of meetings. The same incident contains the first clear statement this group made about the nature of collective working. In response to the discomfort experienced by some individuals it was asserted that decision-making authority resided in the group as a whole, as did overall responsibility for ensuring that tasks were carried out. This statement set the tone for the rest of the group's life. Notwithstanding the ebb and flow of energy in response to events in the environment, the collective behaviour of the group (when constituted) was evidence of the degree of learning which had taken place since its inception. Particularly towards the end of the study period (pages 176 - 177), when the group was faced with the imminent prospect of putting its ideas into action, the steering group's discussions and activities squarely addressed the issues inherent in enacting a non-hierarchical form of organisation.

3. Relationships with the Environment

When the account of Whitefield is considered from this point of view a notable feature is the sporadic nature of interactions with the environment. At various times the 'action' is contained wholly within the constituency of women who related in some way to the Women's Centre; engagement with external agencies occurring only at times which involved the perception of an opportunity or a constraint. In broad terms these variations over time can be seen as responses to threats to the autonomy of the group or as opportunities to enhance its autonomy. During the periods when the level of autonomy was experienced as adequate, interactions with the environment were at a low level. Notions of 'adequacy' are, of course, subject to negotiation and modification, but in general the group's perception of a sufficient physical and organisational space in which to operate, and the ability to operate in accordance with their informing values, are the important criteria here.

Turning to look at these processes in more detail we see that the Women's Centre was both strengthened and legitimated by the mobilization of support in response to antagonism within the Project (page 141), but that while this had the effect of reducing the day-to-day pressure on the Centre, it was still ultimately constrained by the surrounding structure of the Project and, in particular, by the existence of the Management Committee (pages 142, 158). Thus the essentially self-determining form of organisation preferred by the participants (pages 140, 148) was operable, but always within these limitations.

The Women's Centre, as such, appeared little affected by the successful campaign to fight the council's proposed demolition of the building (page 146). In this, and in the later bankruptcy crisis (page 151), participants in the Centre acted very much as other

individuals associated with the Project might, through lobbying and similar activities. However, at the point where the Urban Aid grant had been made, but not released (page 158) and the future of the Project was uncertain, the first suggestion that the Women's Centre should actively seek independence was made. The financial uncertainty appears to have been the 'trigger mechanism' on this occasion, but the need to deal at length with the council and the Social Services department served to reinvoke an awareness of the persistent political constraints on work within the Project. So far these had been acceptable and manageable from a short term perspective, but in the longer run were incompatible with the ideal of a self-determining and autonomous Centre. As has already been noted (page 183) there was support for this idea, but confusion and lack of direction in terms of appropriate action persisted for some time (page 160ff). In addition, this move was, to an extent, counteracted by the other initiative taken at the same time - opening on Saturdays. The positive aspects of this move increased the level of energy and enthusiasm within the Centre, reducing that available for another venture, and also reducing the perceived need for increased autonomy (page 168). However, when suitable premises became available the prospect was sufficiently inviting to provoke renewed action, this time appropriately directed towards effective fund-raising (page 168).

This was the beginning of a process whereby the group was able to increase the effectiveness of its interactions with ouside agencies. Drawing on expertise which already existed, the original 'idealistic' versions of the proposal (pages 166, 173) were rewritten in forms more appropriate for the council and the M.S.C. and publicity was achieved through the local newspaper. The lobbying of councillors (page 175) involved an unprecedented amount of work and coordination and was demonstration of the group's increased ability to initiate and carry

through appropriate interactions with the environment. The resultant narrow failure to achieve their objective was probably as much attributable to the prevailing political climate as to any other factor.

CHAPTER 7

Greystone Women's Centre

CHAPTER SEVEN: GREYSTONE WOMEN'S CENTRE

I. INTRODUCTION

This Women's Centre is located in an inner city area. Between 1970 and 1975 the area had been the focus of a Community Development Project, one of a number of projects established under a Home Office initiative as part of the Urban Programme. At this time the area was undergoing extensive redevelopment; by 1979 it included a number of high-rise blocks and the purpose-built Simpson School and Community College which was the first location for Greystone Women's Centre.

The period of research extends from September 1979 to February 1983 during which the writer has been involved with the Centre as a voluntary worker, a member of the Management Committee and as a member of the Women's Centre Collective. In terms of continuities it must be pointed out that the writer is the only participant who has maintained an involvement with the Centre throughout the whole of this period.

The study divides conveniently into three phases:

i) September 1979 to August 1981. The Women's Information Centre, established as a community project within Simpson School and Community College.

ii) August 1981 to January 1982. The closure of the Women's Information Centre by the school and the events leading to the setting up of the independent Women's Centre Collective.

iii) January 1982 to February 1983. The Women's Centre Collective.

The description and discussion which follows is intended to illustrate both continuities of processes throughout the total period and contrasts in the styles of organising behaviour between the different phases. In a similar manner to the preceeding chapter, the case study material will be discussed at the end of this chapter in terms of the three

themes of (i) organisational movement, (ii) values: their espousal and enactment, and (iii) relationships with the environment.

II. PHASE ONE: SEPTEMBER 1979 TO AUGUST 1981 THE WOMEN'S INFORMATION CENTRE

This description of the first phase of Greystone Women's Centre contains within it the perspectives of different participants and it is perhaps inevitable that no unified picture of 'what was happening' can emerge. As a volunteer whose involvement only slowly increased, my experience of the Centre was partial and cannot represent the overall perspective available to Ann who was the initiator and co-ordinator of the enterprise. However, since the Centre was dependent on up to twenty volunteers whose relationship to it had the same elements of partiality as mine, it is also important to view the activities from this perspective. This difference in organisational location led, in some cases, to fundamentally different appraisals of events which, even after discussion, were to some extent irreconcilable. I have tried to indicate the areas in which this was the case and to outline the differencesin viewpoint. However, I accept that I have probably underplayed some of the more positive aspects of the Centre's activities and focussed instead on those which I experienced as problematic. Here I do not wish to be wholly apologetic; it was through attempting to understand my experience of a form of organisation which I had not previously encountered that the idea of this research took shape. Thus the events prior to October 1981 occurred before my research proposal had been formalised. They are included here, both as necessary to an understanding of the precedents of the independent Women's Centre, and as an exposition of the organisational problems I was seeking to explore. In this early exploration of ideas I was aided by discussions in a research group

which included Jo and Karen. Their contributions provide two more perspectives on the Women's Information Centre; that of a part-time worker and that of a professional who saw the Centre as a place she could develop her work in a non-traditional way.

1. Prologue

In March 1979 Ann was appointed as a community worker at Simpson School and Community College. It was her first job as a community worker - she had previously worked in agricultural co-operatives - and her appointment was part of an almost total replacement of the community team, the previous one having had disagreements with the headmaster which led to a number of resignations. She described the first few months of the job as frustrating ones of hanging around trying to discover what she was intended to do, 'until I realised no-one was going to tell me. I knew that unless I positively did something myself I was going to end up with some general PR work. That's not what I saw as community work.' She also admitted that in part, at least, she had set up the Women's Information Centre to get out of the continual round of community team and local authority meetings. The idea of the Women's Information Centre (WIC) already existed; a number of teachers, including one who was involved in the running of a 'Mums' group, had had a few meetings in which this idea was raised but left very much in the air. So it was as a result of the meeting up of the energies of an underemployed community worker looking for her own particular project, and an idea which was currently around for discussion but was not being acted upon which led to the setting up of the WIC. It does not seem possible to answer the question 'Why this particular idea rather than another?' When I asked her to consider this question some time later (December 1982), Ann responded by saying that she couldn't remember. 'I can't remember how I got

involved . . . I obviously did, but I can't remember how or why I got involved in that particular thing.'

However, early publicity material is clear on the intentions of the project and identifies the gap in existing provisions which the Centre could fill.

> . . . it became apparent that there was a need to provide additional support to the women and mothers in the local area of Simpson School. The idea of setting up a room or Centre came from the Mums group which meets in Simpson and was responded to by the community workers and teachers concerned. Simpson is involved in a Mothers' group, Mums and toddlers group, an Asian girls' group, teaching English as a foreign language, and many other community activities. It was felt, however, that a wider need had not been catered for, a fact which has been highlighted in the past when crisis situations emphasised the need for a place or a means to give more time and advice to women involved with these problems, whether it be relationship, health or financial worries. It was clearly understood that such a place had to be outside the home and outside the official atmosphere of the school or other professional services. From this, the idea of setting up a Women's Information Centre was engendered.

This report continues by outlining the aims of the Centre.

> The main aim of the Centre is to provide a supportive and easily accessible place to go:
> - In times of crisis relating to family or relationship problems (i.e. cases of battering, homelessness)
> - To obtain welfare rights information (such as supplementary benefit enquiries, exceptional needs grants, maternity benefits, sexual discrimination, disablement benefits, etc.)
> - Pregnancy counselling (practical information on pregnancy, adoption, abortion, welfare benefits, etc.)
> - For information on the facilities or organisations in the area (nurseries, family planning clinics, community groups, day and evening classes, training courses, youth opportunity projects, and other groups)
> - For free legal advice
> - For advice on accomodation, private or council housing. Rights for landlords and tenants.
> - For health advice/discussion groups concerning women's health (i.e. drugs and their effects, breast cancer, cervical smears, menopause, miscarriage), and also information on children's health.

During the summer of 1979 Ann worked towards making her project a reality. The community team had vacated a room in an annexe to the main school and she took it over. 'No-one said I couldn't, so I did.'

While working on the summer play scheme she 'borrowed' two Community Enterprise girls and cleaned and decorated the room, whilst also amassing the information necessary to provide the advice service. So, by the beginning of the Autumn term the stage was set; it remained to fill it with people.

2. The Training Course and the Opening of the Centre

I was invited to become involved with the WIC during the Autumn term. At the time I was teaching adult education classes in the school, and although I was unaware of it at the time, it was primarily because I was teaching 'Rights and Responsibilities' (an O-level course in basic law), and was therefore presumed to know about welfare rights, that contact was made; '. . . it was what we needed.' At that time I had had no contact with Women's Centres and I had really no idea what a WIC was, but I was underemployed, interested in welfare rights law, and the idea sounded interesting, so I started attending the training sessions together with two of my sociology students. The first talk, by an Asian community worker who described the variety of ethnic groups within the sub-continent, was such that one of the students saw it as 'a Centre for Asian women' and did not attend again. The other student eventually worked on the rota as a volunteer for some months before leaving to take a paid job with a similar agency in the city. Most of the other attenders were women living locally who participated in the 'Mums' group, and my impression was that this course had originally been organised as a welfare rights course for this group, and was now relabelled as a training course for volunteers.

This first training course emphasised the acquisition of knowledge which was seen as necessary to provide the advice service described on page 192. Obviously the scope of this is considerable

and there were limits to the amount of useable information which could be transmitted in a short course. In addition, the training course devoted some time to sessions which, through role-play and other related techniques, directly focussed on the volunteer's behaviour in relation to clients. These were run with the help of a member of the drama department of the school and involved the acting out and discussion of likely 'problem situations'. Some six months later there was another course of the same type but at a higher level of sophistication, in that it was run by a lecturer in counselling skills from a local college and included the use of video-feedback techniques. I found these sessions enjoyable and interesting, but also quite challenging. For some of the volunteers this challenge appeared to be too great and their attendance lapsed. The intention of these sessions was to develop ways of relating to clients which would be markedly different from that of statutory agencies. To quote the publicity material again:

> The aim of the Centre is not just to become another Information Centre, but we hope it will develop into a place women can get a lot of time and support in an informal atmosphere. (The) volunteers are women who have faced similar problems to those who may come to the Centre for help and advice.

It was intended that the Centre would eventually be run by local women who would be able to relate to clients on the basis of similar life experiences and who would be able to take time over a problem in a way that was impossible for the statutory agencies. The training course was part of a general direction towards developing a self-help mode of organisation by supporting and training a group over a period of time until they are in a position to take over the running of the organisation. This approach is a well-established one within community work. Ann commented:

> I saw it as a very normal part of community work in the sense that you initiate a project, you get people involved, you get them to run it themselves and you move away.

However, this espousal of the self-help model must be seen in conjunction with the worker-client orientation of the training course. Although standards were later relaxed, at this stage volunteers were being presented with a role-model of a quasi-professional who was both familiar with a wide range of information about legal and welfare rights and who possessed a high level of interpersonal skills.

In January 1980 the Women's Information Centre opened with something of a flourish in the local community. It was presented as something different from any of the existing services - somewhere for local women to drop in, share their problems and work things out on a self-help basis. The length of time taken to set it up was short; less than six months, and while there was some feeling of unreadiness, Ann considered that the advantages of opening outweighed the disadvantages.

> . . . come the January, because the course and the room was together . . . It was speeding it a little bit - I'm not one for hanging about. I don't think it's good to hang on too long - we actually opened up and went full bent into it, in the sense that I don't think we were quite prepared, but I was prepared to work hard at overcoming the fact that we didn't have enough volunteers, for instance. And it did happen, it didn't take too long actually to get a lot more people, more training courses and groups together. The actual fact that you're open just created that impetus rather than sitting back talking about it for months.

Her description of the opening day gives a good indication of the WIC's primary location in the local social network.

> It was very crowded; the whole day there were people in and out. There were all the people from the legal and income rights centre, there were the vicars, there were all the local community workers, lots of local mums, all the people working with local mums and toddler groups, health visitors - all those contacts which are the kind of contacts you have as a community worker rather than as something else.

The fact that the Centre was specifically orientated towards women did not at that time lead to any discussion of questions which became

important later concerning the role of men. In fact the early publicity material states that 'men are welcome too!'

3. The Rota System

After the opening day the Centre was open for four and a half days a week, and I began working on the rota on Friday mornings. The intention was, although it did not always work out in practice, that there should always be two people in the Centre and at this time my co-worker was a Social Work student. The point of this was to allow one of the workers to accompany a women to, for example, the DHSS offices and help her to make a claim if necessary. On two occasions I did this with a woman who presented herself to the Centre as homeless, in that I helped her to sign on for benefit and look for somewhere to live, and later moved her from a hostel to a council flat.

However, for much of the time I was on the rota very little happened. It is possible that the time in the week when I was most often there was atypical (and other workers did report some very busy sessions), but there is no doubt that a general problem confronting volunteers was that the number and type of clients using the Centre on a drop-in basis was irregular and unpredictable. The training sessions had perhaps produced an expectation of higher levels of work activity than was usually the case. What I experienced was long periods of inactivity interspersed with major problems. For example, two I particularly remember having to deal with on my own were a battered woman seeking an emergency injunction and another who, without warning, attempted to cut her wrists with a milk bottle. In both cases I felt quite inadequate to the situation.

The need to manage the unpredictability of having 'too much' or 'too little' to do was one which volunteers dealt with in different ways. Initially the student and I spent a lot of time just sitting

around waiting for people to come in; there was a feeling that somehow we should be 'ready'. Later we began bringing in other work to do while we waited and also, probably because we both had academic interests, we spent some time talking about record-keeping and analysing the way the Centre was used. Other volunteers adapted differently; there was usually a list displayed of minor tasks to be done, but very often the time was spent chatting, reading books and making private phone calls. Thus, although the 'inactive' periods were used by volunteers in ways which were pleasant and productive for them personally, this could only in the broadest sense be seen as useful preparation for the occasional crisis. Moreover, with the limited amount of time each volunteer spent in the Centre, major problems of the same type did not occur with sufficient frequency for them to constitute a useful learning experience. The relatively short time spent in the Centre produced other difficulties for volunteers; while the idea of 'talking through' a problem implies an open-ended approach I, in common with some of the other workers, had young children and it was difficult to find a way of saying, 'I can listen to you sympathetically until 12 O'clock, then I have to lock the Centre and collect my daughter'.

However, it was more usual for clients to bring to the Centre expectations derived from their experiences with conventional agencies - that is, one of fairly immediate problem solving, and to some extent this view was endorsed by the way in which the Centre operated. For each client a record-sheet was filled in with details of the problem she presented and the action taken. This was done both to prevent the distress of having to tell her story anew to different volunteers and as an aid to efficiency in an attempt to ensure continuity of action. Nevertheless, it did little to persuade a newcomer that the Centre was other than 'just another agency'.

The realisation that the emphasis on problem solving was perhaps inimical to the development of other aspects of the Centre's work le d to a gradual shift in emphasis. The room was reorganised to look less like an office and more time and energy was given to promoting group work. The definition of a competent volunteer was one which was subject to continual renegotiation and it was now apparent that the original expectations had been pitched at too high a level. Stress was now placed on being able to retrieve and act on information from the filing system, rather than expecting it to be fully learned. The rule of thumb adopted for welfare rights[1] problems was to do no more than you would do for yourself in terms of making phone calls and writing letters. Although this might appear to be a great deal less than the service it was originally intended to provide, in practice it normally turned out to be a great deal more than most clients were able to undertake for themselves. It was also more than some volunteers were able to undertake without support and it was necessary to accept and recognise that there was, in fact, a 'two tier' system of volunteers operating. In part this arose because training courses were not continuous and there had to be other ways of assimilating new recruits into the organisation. This was generally done by putting them on the same rota spot as an experienced volunteer who was able to show them the ropes. However, there were also other factors operating here.

1. A few hundred yards from the Centre there was a well-established and competent agency which specialised in this field. Relations were poor with this agency over a long period of time and it was not until the WIC had reduced its aspirations in this area that they improved. Attacks came in two forms, both levelled at standards of competence. On the one hand Centre workers were accused of making mistakes which they had to 'clean up', and on the other, that they were incapable of distinguishing between simple and complex problems; too many of the first kind would be referred on, not enough of the second.

The women working on the rota could broadly be divided into two categories: those living locally who had only a basic education, and frequently were unused to routine aspects of working in an office, and those who were 'imported' from outside, normally graduates and chosen for a particular skill they had to offer. Ann was quite clear about the mixture of women she wanted to attract into the Centre and the reasons for it.

> I spent a lot of time enccuraging local mums - going round to the house and having a cup of tea and talking them into coming to the Centre, and coming to the training course and them doing their morning stint and supporting them through that. I spent far more time on that and wanted to keep away, for instance, students and people who just wander in and take over - who've got nothing to do with the area, even though they could be useful, and I used them, but to a limited extent. I didn't want them to take over. And as soon as there are more people like that around the local mums wouldn't come in anyway, 'cos it's not their social scene. Part of the Centre's social; you chat and get on with people, feel comfortable there. If it became more of those kind of people they wouldn't have come. So I was always balancing between those two sides of things.

In a later conversation with Jo (who was appointed as part-time counsellor for young women in June 1980) I expressed the feeling that in those early days I had felt very isolated, and that it was not until later that I experienced any sense of working with women. She suggested that a lot of the other volunteers would say the opposite, and went on, 'I think you, because of your background and experience were given that role, whereas a lot of the other volunteers were never actually allowed to (work on their own), which was very difficult'. She summed up the problem in this way:

> Being realistic, someone new coming in, doesn't even like answering the phone. All right, fair enough. But I mean that's a bit tricky when you're doing that kind of work. So it'll take them a lot of time and they would need someone with them who's done a bit more till they feel confident. Well that's O.K., but it has implications, and we have other women like yourself who know the ropes and

> can manage. So you've got your two tiers whether you like it or not, and the question is what you do with it.

This tension between the avowed aim of a Centre run as a self-help project by local women and the present-time, contingent use of the skills of graduate 'outsiders' is a continual theme in this phase of the Women's Centre. It must be noted, however, that the dichotomous terms in which these two groups were conceptualised clearly over-simplified the issue; as I have already indicated there were occasions when I felt far from competent and equally some of the local women were far from lacking in skills.

In line with these principles of self-help the ideal-typical career of a volunteer who 'makes the grade' may be outlined. In considering this progression the implicit elements of personal growth and the acquisition of skills should be borne in mind.

i) The potential volunteer would be a local woman, often a single parent, and would first approach the Centre as a client.

ii) Depending on the type of problem she would be encouraged to join one of the existing groups such as the single parent's group, or to attend a training course.

iii) Here - and this is essential - she would find enough support and interest in the situation to keep coming back.

iv) She would then be eligible, with induction and supervision from an established volunteer, to take a place on the rota.

v) Through this process she would learn how to make phone calls and write letters, to use contacts and information, until she was considered sufficiently competent to work on her own.

Two local women, Gina and Iris, at different times, did succeed in this and achieved the position of part-time paid worker. A further stage

in which the volunteer has gained sufficient skills and self-confidence to successfully apply for a job or a training course, and thus to leave the Centre, is discussed on page 220.

4. Decision Making and the Management Committee

In the first draft of this section I stated, 'Initially there was no participative decision-making process, nor any formal forum for the discussion of issues between workers in the Centre.' Ann has responded by saying that, 'participation went on all the time through me, and there were meetings right from the beginning.' I would still argue that most decision-making at that time took place in a context which was outside the limited involvement of volunteers with the Centre. Also, since any individual spent only a small part of the week there, there could be only limited contact between the volunteers. However, a degree of continuity and communication was introduced by the appointment, early in 1980, of Gina as a part-time co-ordinator.

The first discussion between workers which is minuted took place in May 1980. It was set up to receive a report from a student who had been working on placement in the Centre. This presentation led to a discussion of the current status of the Centre and some proposals for modifying it; some proposals were never acted upon and others not until much later. The discrepancies between the current realities and the potential or ideal state were highlighted, and the basic questions raised here - what kind of organisation should the WIC be, and how should we work in order to move towards that position? - are restated and reconsidered at frequent intervals over time.

Seven people, including myself, attended the meeting. The others were two teachers from the school, the student presenting the report, two local women (one an ex-client, the other the part-time worker), and a professional working in the area. The student's brief

had been to consider the extent of social problems in the area and the role of the Centre in relation to them. Her analysis highlighted the range of problems such as homelessness, higher than average proportions of elderly, one-parent families and unemployment which might be found in any inner city area, but her conclusion was that the Centre should offer a social environment rather than an 'official' one; there were already sufficient official and semi-official agencies in existence in the area.[2] The meeting endorsed this view and went on to consider the present use of the Centre. To quote from the minutes:

> Gina (the part-time co-ordinator) commented on the relatively few local women involved in the Centre. Few came to meetings and few were volunteers. This was also commented on by most people present. It was decided that the new committee should look into this in detail and that perhaps one solution was more fieldwork in the local area.

This short-fall of volunteers was related to the original decision to open for four-and-a-half days a week, which meant that Gina was doing a great deal of filling-in and that it was rarely possible to have two volunteers on duty as had been intended. In retrospect it was felt that it would probably have been better to start by opening for only two days a week and to expand from there, but that as the opening hours had already been publicised it was better to try to persevere with them. The meeting also produced strong agreement about the need for some form of decision-making committee, and in particular emphasised the need for a format which broke down the distinction between clients, volunteers and professionals. It also considered that the current emphasis on problem solving discouraged casual drop-in use of the Centre. The

2. One after-effect of the Community Development Project in the early 1970's was that this area was better provided with advice agencies than other parts of the city.

minutes record:

> General comments were made by all the volunteers on the need for people who worked in the Centre to see it as a corporate venture rather than as a Centre run by one or two 'professionals' with volunteer helpers. It was thought that a more open approach to decisions on the Centre was needed so that everyone had a say in important issues. If this happened it might encourage the volunteers who appear to have dropped out of late.

Following this a Management Committee was established and the first meeting took place on 14 July 1980. However, as constituted, it did not conform closely to the intentions of the previous meeting, being primarily a representative body rather than a participative one. The minutes record that the structure was agreed on collectively, but in a later conversation Ann indicated that most of the work leading up to this decision had already been done by her.

> Before the Centre opened I'd spent quite some time on my own working out very closely what the decision-making structure should be. I'd actually worked out how many should be this, how many should be outsiders - I think there were four outsiders. They were chosen from the various agencies in Greystone which would be the most help to the Centre. Then there were so many volunteers, they, of course, would have predominated. And then there was the so-called staff which was myself and Jo. I actually worked out a voting system and when the volunteers can totally overthrow the Management Committee.

The people who did attend the first Management Committee were myself and two other volunteers, the three staff of the Centre, a teacher, a social worker and a representative from the British Pregnancy Advisory Service. At this meeting I was elected chairperson, a position which was intended to rotate after six months but which I continued to hold until May 1981 when I realised how long I had been doing it and suggested that someone else take the job on. The length of service is in part due to the fact that the job was not particularly onerous or meaningful and is also attributable to the fact that no one else showed any eagerness to take on the task.

The voting system was never made fully explicit, nor ever used. The nature of the meetings did not lead to the presentation of clear cut proposals on which either/or decisions could be taken. Instead, in the main, they consisted of discussions of issues which led to proposals for implementation or further exploration, and reporting back on what had happened since the last meeting. That this particular style of meeting became the norm (and as time went on the emphasis moved towards more reporting back and less initiating) must be related to the intervals between them and the nature of participation for the various members. As meetings took place approximately every four weeks it was necessary to differentiate between 'policy' and day-to-day decisions. The former were clearly the domain of the Management Committee, but residual decisions or those which arose in the implementation of policy were not so clearly located. That such decisions would come to rest amongst those who could make the greatest inputs of time and had the best access to information - in essence the paid staff - was not made clear, although at other times there were short-lived attempts to place these decisions with a smaller sub-group meeting at more frequent intervals.

Placing both the ideological imperative to develop some form of bottom-up management of the Centre and the aim of maintaining and extending links with other relevant agencies within the same part of the organisational structure resulted in a stultification in which neither objective was satisfactorily achieved. For the professionals, Management Committee meetings were just one more meeting to be slotted into an already busy schedule, and it was apparent from the level of apologies and non-attendance that in general it was not one which was given particularly high priority. On the other hand the fact that similar meetings were a normal part of their working life meant that when they did attend it was easy for

them to use the setting to articulate a viewpoint which would influence any decision-making, or to direct the focus of a discussion into areas which were of concern to them. Jo's reflection on her first Management Committee meeting illustrates the traditional aspects of the structure and comments on the position of local women in relation to it.

> What appealed to me was that it was this very locally based project, and then we had this thing called a Management Committee. To me Management Committees mean local authority structures which means formal paid employment. It meant something quite frightening to me even then. To the local volunteers the Management Committee was something they would never envisage having anything to do with.

Although local women were usually present, their unfamiliarity with meetings as such prevailed against effective participation. A small number were able to use it as a learning experience and the second chairperson of the Committee was a local woman, but most were not.

An alternative to this view of the Management Committee comes from the community work side through Ann and the school. Here it was seen as radical and innovatory. Ann said that in terms of her ideas on self-help management ' . . . I was trying to put control out of my hands into the hands of a Management Committee, and I fought with the Head about that constantly. He doesn't believe in self-help.' There are conflicts too in the process of moving toward the independence of a community work project. Ann recalled, 'I was always trying to put it across to them (the school) that the Management Committee had the decisions ', but in a later conversation she described the situation rather differently.

> The Management Committee in its true sense could be seen more as a consultative body, with the ultimate aim of preparing the volunteers slowly and gradually to take more responsibility and perhaps eventually to take over the Centre when it was able to become independent. So, in a way, though I set the Management Committee up as a decision making body I saw it as only half that in many ways; it wouldn't become that until it became independent.

I have suggested that this view of the Management Committee should be taken as one which has the benefit of hindsight, when the difficulty of constructing a responsive and responsible decision-making body is clearer. Certainly, at that time I was not aware of its quasi-token nature. However, Ann has argued against this view, and drawn my attention to her statement of development aims, from which I quote:

> Unlike many similar projects the setting up of the Centre was not based on an already existing cohesive group of people. A number of different women volunteered to work in the Centre (some from the Mums groups, from other contacts within the school, students and other agencies) and a cohesiveness as a group has now to be worked on and takes time. As the community worker responsible for setting up the Centre, I have always seen my role as one of encouragement, providing the resources for such a Centre to come about, a link with the school and other community workers and agencies - one of development. I have always been well aware that the Centre should in no way depend on my work - from the beginning I have been working towards establishing a core group of volunteers, the idea of participation (through volunteer meetings and the setting up of a Management Committee) and a means by which all volunteers can take part in what the Centre is doing. This is not an easy task - new volunteers in a new project demand guidance from someone else, their short session in the Centre and their home commitments do not allow them much time to take on extra work and tasks.

Here we see an identified aim - the production of a cohesive group - as a necessary antecedent to an independent Centre. The means by which this aim might be achieved are also indicated - through the personal support and encouragement of Ann and through the Management Committee. Some of the difficulties inherent in this approach have already been indicated, namely the diverse membership and the alienating effect of this format on some of the members, and the relative infrequency of the meetings. The first, pre-Management Committee meeting (described on page 202) had also identified a need for the Centre to be seen as a 'corporate venture', but on this occasion the suggested means were 'a more open approach to decision making'. It is doubtful whether, as constructed, the Committee

could fulfill this requirement, but some considerable time was to elapse before the problem could be stated in those terms.

One of the professionals brought onto the Committee was Karen, a psychologist working within the National Health Service. From that perspective her initial feelings about the Management Committee are in contrast to those of Jo.

> . . . because of my work experience, coming out of something that was much more structured, incredibly hierarchical, and therefore what I was impressed by was probably on a comparative basis with the experience I had.

She did feel some disquiet about the representativeness of the Management Committee, but the marginality of her position at this time did not allow the feelings to develop to the point of action.

> The people that I knew were about the Centre a lot didn't seem to be appearing at the Management Committee. I don't think I let my thoughts go any further than that. I don't think at the time I was very interested in the structure of the Centre. I was seeing it from a very selfish view in the sense that I'd only been at the hospital for a month and was already aware that it wasn't going to be an easy place for me to work in, and so it (the Centre) was very much a haven.

My own experiences stemming from the position of chairperson are probably pivotal in the process of my deepening involvement with the Centre. Prior to this my commitment was fairly low; except on rare, crisis-ridden occasions the demands made on me were not great, I was not experiencing much in the way of positive feedback for what I did do, nor did I feel I had the information base which might make it appropriate for me to take initiatives. However, this new position appeared as a recognition of the skills I did have, and meant that I was used as a discussant by Ann in, for example, such matters as funding applications. The process of drawing up agendas increased my knowledge of people and activities; it also made me aware that this process was largely chanelled through Ann.

An examination of the Management Committee minutes for the period up to January 1981 shows the focus of activity and discussion to be directed fairly narrowly. A series of health talks was set up, and the process of publicising these and the Centre in general was given importance. This was done by leafleting, talking to local mothers groups, advertisements in the local newspaper and a public service announcement on television. A great deal of work was done by Ann to find sources of funding which would enable the Centre to employ its own workers, and in this she was successful to the extent that a local charitable trust agreed to fund a part-time counsellor for young women for three years. Jo was appointed to this post in June 1980. Small amounts of money were also raised from other sources, but the larger applications to bodies such as Urban Aid were unsuccessful. The progress of these applications was brought to the Management Committee, but the question of whether they should be undertaken or not was not. It was always known that the present premises had a short life and there was an ongoing exploration of other possibilities. And, in addition, there was always some discussion about how the Centre and the management structure was operating, the contradictions that appeared to be inherent in the situation and some suggestions for their amelioration. The following extracts from the minutes are illustrative. When asked whether the Centre was operating as a social centre or as a place for 'women with problems', Ann replied that the Centre:

> . . . could be an informal drop-in place for women to come, but that we couldn't encourage it to become a busy crowded place (and) that in order for the Centre to succeed on a self-help basis this must be kept as its focus. This is threatened if the Centre takes on too much or becomes too wide in its concerns.

At the next meeting it was noted that:

> The idea of the Centre running on a self-help basis is a difficult one to make work. Many of the volunteers lack confidence - the Centre is important

> not just for people who come in with queries, but for the volunteers themselves. The volunteers and the situations they have to deal with are so varied that it is impossible to say why they stop coming.

The solution to low attendance at meetings proposed on this occasion was to move the meetings from the evening to lunchtimes.

In January 1981 two staff changes took place. Gina, the part-time co-ordinator, left to take a full-time job and no funding was available to replace her. Ann reduced her working hours to allow herself more time to pursue her other interests and, although the hours she did work were spent wholly in the Centre, the minutes recorded 'because of these changes it is now more important than ever that volunteers and members of the Management Committee take a greater interest in the Centre.' One response to these changes was to close the Centre on Fridays so that my perceived competence could be redeployed on another day. Another was a proposal aimed at engendering greater interest which was made at the February meeting.

> It might be a good idea to have a small group of four or five people who would meet regularly, perhaps once a fortnight, to keep up to date on what the Centre is doing. This group would make proposals to the larger group, i.e. the Management Committee which could make the final decision, but the smaller group would be able to present clearly to the Management Committee what the choices were on any particular issue.

By now Management Committee meetings consisted almost entirely of reporting back on current activities, and this move towards devolution can be seen as a response to feelings of tokenism on the part of its members. Interest and attendance were at a low ebb; meetings were asking for ratification of existing activities and also, with members as representatives of outside bodies, for dissemination of information about these activities to client groups. Thus the proposed restructuring can be seen as an attempt to move closer to the information base and so acquire the kind of knowledge which would

facilitate a real participation in deciding the sorts of activities undertaken. There is a double bind operating here; in order to gain this kind of knowledge it is necessary for a volunteer to spend an amount of time in the Centre which approaches that of the paid staff, on the other hand there is no impetus to do so unless this greater participation carries with it some benefits such as the right to have a greater influence on the shape of the future. Some of the unemployed graduates who did spend an amount of time working in the Centre found that their sense of direction was too much at odds with the community work perspective to be contained within the same setting, although on this point Ann has countered that the Centre was not set up to meet the needs of graduates.

The establishment of the 'smaller group' was short-lived. In May 1981 it was stated at the Management Committee that the 'main form of participation should be through this committee and that therefore there will be no steering committee.' The structural emphases remained unchanged; 'Two volunteer members are to be replaced as they no longer work in the Centre. It was decided that the place of (a professional who moved to another job) remain open for her replacement.' At this meeting another way of extending the knowledge base was tried out. It was suggested 'that for one week we record all the telephone enquiries and visits to the Centre as we are not doing this, to get a picture of everything going on in one week.'

During the summer of 1981 a small group of women, including myself, began to meet in order to try to identify the reasons for the low level of participation and to consider what could be done to counter this. Here the question was raised as to whether the ideological objective of decision-sharing was in practice unworkable because of the wide variation in such parameters as skills, knowledge or length of service. Before this question could be fully explored events outside the Centre meant that other forms of action had to take precedence.

5. The School and the Local Authority

It has already been noted that the speed with which the WIC was established was, to a very great extent, due to Ann's initiatives in commandeering resources from the school. This meant that, in addition to the free use of a room and the imputs of Ann herself as a community worker, the Centre also enjoyed free postage, printing and telephone calls. These benefits did not, of ccurse, come completely without cost. For the Centre to continue undisturbed it was necessary tc avoid upsetting the school - essentially that whatever the Centre did should be non-controversial. To this end it was written intc the formal statement of aims that the Centre would not engage in any form of direct political action.[3] (Later this apolitical stance produced its own costs, in that the Centre came under attack from the nearby Benefits Centre who considered a failure to take a campaigning approach to social issues an abdication of moral responsibility, and refused tc endorse a funding application for Urban Aid (p.208). There were costs too in the loss of some volunteers who wanted to get into areas of work which were perceived as too threatening for the school to countenance, and from which they were dissuaded.)

Although the extent of it was not apparent to many people within the Centre, a great deal of Ann's energies went into negotiating the relation between the school and the Centre. She later described how she saw the situation:

> I always saw myself in the middle between the volunteers, the people on the Management Committee, and the school . . . and it's like on the one hand I was always fighting the school for more freedom for the Centre, so I was going in

3. This had particular pertinence at the time since an adjacent building was housing a sit-in of parents protesting at its closure as a nursery school.

> like that and saying, 'Leave it alone and just let it be', and stopping them interfering in any way and at the same time in a sense holding back the Centre or people in it who'd want to strive outwards more explicitly, which I knew just couldn't be, cos I saw what could be and couldn't be in that situation. So to keep (the Head) happy - I saw what we could get out of that - it also meant we couldn't do other things. I was very much in the middle.

I asked her whether she considered that the compromise which was struck was the 'right' one, and there was no doubt that she did. 'Obviously I didn't like the compromise very much, but when you saw the benefits - no other Centre would have free premises . . . No, I think the benefits were enormous - it just couldn't have happened any other way.' One example of the demarcation disputes which occurred arose when the appointment of Jo was taking place.

> For instance when the money started rolling in - who had control of the money? I was always saying, 'It's the Centre's money, nothing to do with you.' He (the Head) didn't like that, and when Jo was employed they were trying to keep it to themselves - a normal local authority appointment. I said 'No, it's not, nothing to do with you. It's our money and I got it.'

However these negative attitudes were not in themselves sufficient to provoke aggressive actions on the part of the school. 'It's really quite strange that on the one hand they were obviously afraid of or disagreed with our main principles, and yet they allowed me to do it.'

The additional factor which did lead to a reaction from the school related to the premises the Centre was occupying. It had always been known that the building which housed the Centre, as well as the youth club and the English as a foreign language classes was unfit, and would eventually be demolished to make way for a bus garage. When this happened it was intended that these activities would be transferred to another nearby building which was to be fully converted to provide a more suitable environment. The first version of the plans included a 'shop-front' for the WIC, which would have meant a considerable

improvement in accessibility over the present location. Ann recorded later, 'While we were being praised (by the community team) for all our good work and being described as, 'the only effective example of community development at Simpson' other moves were afoot.' In August 1981, when the projected date for the move was next January - or as soon as the improvements had been carried out - the news broke that the Magistrate's Courts were going to take over the building in the near future. As this was just before the Centre was to be closed for two weeks and everyone was taking their holidays, Ann phoned the Homes and Properties department of the Council and the Courts to make sure nothing was going to happen in the next couple of weeks.

> They assured me we wouldn't be affected - they weren't going to touch the Centre. One of them gave the date of October 29 as the day they would have to come in and start work on the toilets - but not until then. On August 19, while everyone was away, the removal vans came directed by (the director of education) himself. (Two of the community team) were left to pack up all the information, books, files and furniture in the Centre and put them in temporary rooms. They were given permission to put them in a room in the Annexe by (the head and the school administrator). On September 2 I returned back from holiday to find the Centre was a load of boxes, chairs stacked in a small room in the Annexe. The Annexe itself looked like a bomb-site.

6. Other Activities

Before continuing to trace out the events surrounding the WIC in the next phase of its history, this section will fill out the picture of the first phase by examining more closely the range of people and activities who were associated with the Centre, and also the differing perspectives and forms of involvement which these entailed.

Considering first the Management Committee, an examination of the records of the eight meetings held between May 1980 and June 1981 shows that, while attendance at any one meeting ranged between five and nine, a total of 23 different women attended on at least one occasion.

These may be categorised as follows: 4 were paid workers, 3 were students, 9 professionals working in other agencies, 4 local volunteers and 3 graduate volunteers. Six women attended on four or more occasions; these were, three of the paid workers, myself, a social worker and a community worker with the Community Relations Council. However, it has already been pointed out that the Management Committee was only partially representative of the activities of the Centre. A full count of the large number of women (and the few men) who had dealings with the Centre would need to include all those who presented as clients for problem solving, all the interested professionals who came in to make contact or to exchange information, students from the University or the Polytechnic who used the Centre as a base for their projects, people giving talks or running groups and those who attended them, members of the school staff and occasional local authority officials who saw the Centre as part of their concerns, and all those who, via one of these routes or another, worked as volunteers. With this background it is, at first sight, difficult to understand the consistent experience of insufficient women to staff the rota.

One aspect of the Centre's work which has not so far been discussed is the various kinds of group work which were undertaken. In particular, it is useful to look at the position this work occupied in the total range of services and activities available in the area. Two different, although not necessarily exclusive, approaches were in operation here. On the one hand the impetus to engage in some particular form of activity would come from the identification of a client group; the organisation of some activity directed at their perceived needs would take place, and they would then be persuaded to become involved with it. Alternatively, women within the Centre would organise primarily for themselves, and the activity would be sufficiently attractive to outsiders to draw them to it. Ideally there

would be no discrepancy between these two approaches; local women working within the Centre would organise activities related to their experiences which, a priori, would also be of relevance to other local women who would become involved on the basis of 'shared life experiences'. An early series of health talks was successful in this respect, giving rise to a group for single parents and a menopause support group.

An adaptation of the first approach was for community workers and other professionals to act as brokers between the Centre and the client group to which they had particular access. Asian women were one group who were seen as likely to benefit from involvement with the Centre, and in the early days two Asian professionals attended some Management Committee meetings. One was a community worker with the Community Relations Council (CRC), the other a teacher of English as a foreign language who also spent some time on the rota. Through these contacts the first series of health talks was publicised among the Asian community and the possibility of providing interpreters was considered, although in the event there was insufficient interest for this to be warranted. At one meeting 'it was stressed that Asian women would only come to the Centre if there was something to do. They were unlikely to come just to talk.' The next meeting minuted, 'There is a need for an activity to which Asian women can be invited, either one to be started here, or the Centre could liase with an ongoing group. (The CRC worker) may be able to help with such a group.' The next move was to arrange two health talks in Asian languages. 'We need to work out what we can and cannot do in terms of working with Asian women . . . an Asian health visitor is willing to take over the talks if and when they get off the ground.'

After that there are no further references to working with Asian women in the minutes and the CRC worker ceased to attend meetings.

This failure to engage with the Asian community to any great extent is best understood when it is appreciated that there were already well-developed bases for social activities in the area. Notably, there was a Family Centre attached to another local school which was well used, and the interrelation of social and religious activities is also important. Hence it may be argued that the Centre had 'identified', and was attempting to respond to, a need which was not, in fact, reciprocated on the part of the client group.

In other areas activities did take off, although not always in the intended direction. Jo's job title was 'counsellor for girls and young women', and her working hours were arranged for the late afternoon and early evening so that she could see clients by appointment when the Centre was otherwise unused. She describes how she felt about having to go out and 'tout' for custom, and the problems which ensued when her client group turned out to be different from the anticipated one.

> (It's) O.K. if you're employed by the Social Services or a school or whatever, but when I did the ground work going round local agencies saying I was employed by the WIC to be a counsellor for young women - nothing! I had next to no credibility, and this problem developed whereby I actually began to have women coming in for counselling and therapy and I enjoyed that. I felt it was valuable, you know, but they were very definitely middle-class, intelligent feminist women, and the women I was supposed to be working with were the 16 to 25 year olds, a very different group of women altogether, and they didn't really come in except for organised events, and there was this feeling by some people that I shouldn't be doing that sort of counselling. If I did they should come at some other time and they should pay, because this was not the role of the WIC. That was difficult because the bit I enjoyed most was the work with those women, because they knew what they wanted, they came to do it and we did some good work. The rest of the time I felt I was trying to sell something to people who didn't particularly want to know.

The counselling service being provided here is one which is understood and usable by middle-class women, but without endorsements by and referrals from statutory agencies it is unlikely to come within the

need-fulfillment expectations of local women. It is also some way from the avowed commitment to developing self-help forms of work, since it clearly embodies a client/professional configuration. A likely explanation here is that a very large number of funding applications were made; this particular one bore fruit.

It is clear from the foregoing and from other examples in the text that, in developing the work of the Centre there was also a need to develop working relationships with other agencies and relevant professionals in the area. In addition, the range of advice offered by the Centre (page 192) made it inevitable that there would be many outside contacts - and to this end there were extensive lists of names and telephone numbers. However, while the training courses directed attention to the contacts which were available, they included little discussion of how these were to be handled. Some relationships, notably with the school and the local authority, were negotiated almost totally by Ann, because of her particular position. Others, with agencies such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and local housing associations, were largely unproblematic since, in the main, they consisted of 'referring on' appropriate cases. The two agencies with which the most difficult relations were experienced in the early days were the Benefits Centre and the Social Services department. The case of the Benefits Centre has already been noted on page 198. In both instances the difficulties arose through a reaction to the feeling that amateurs were attempting to set themselves up in competition with established professionals. Mediating this situation with the Benefits Centre involved a considerable withdrawal from their field of expertise. The modification in the case of Social Services was rather different; when it was made clear through discussion that the role of the WIC could be complementary to their work by creating a space where clients could talk at greater length than was otherwise

possible, they became increasingly supportive. One member of the District Team was a member of the Management Committee from the start, and continued as a member of the subsequent Women's Centre Collective.

Thus, from the perspective of 'relevant agencies', four different forms of interaction with the Centre may be identified. Relatively uninvolved relationships occur where there is simple 'referring on' as in the case of housing associations, or where a key worker decides the Centre has little to offer her client group, as the Asian community worker appeared to do. For those who did interact more closely with the Centre this involvement would persist as long as the Centre was seen to provide some useful supplementary service for their client group, or as a location where they themselves could work on alternative provisions. The former may be seen in referrals from Social Services of clients who 'need time to talk', the latter is exampled by the Probation Service's setting up of a support group for female ex-offenders and the account of Karen's work which follows.

This account illustrates the mixture of choice and chance events which led to Karen's involvement with the Centre, first on a narrow base, and later in a much more wide ranging way. Her first contact was almost fortuitous. 'I saw an advert on women and health courses at the WIC and we spent half an hour looking for the place, and were just about to give up when somebody actually knew where it was.' She was unsure what kind of organisation she had come across, but was interested enough to explore further. This was mainly because she had come to Greystone with the intention of trying to put into practice some ideas which, so far, had found no location in which they could be acted on.

> My reaction was just very confused, afterwards hanging about and talking to Ann, explaining that I'd just arrived in the area . . . interested in what was going on and Ann was saying 'that would be really interesting if you want to get involved' . . . it came at a time when I had actually made a decision that, rather than just talking about politics, I would act them out.

Here a fit has been made; the minutes of the Management Committee held in July 1980 record:

> Ann suggested that the Centre needs a consultant in psychiatric care to act as consultant to the Centre for those cases with which we need more expert advice. It was suggested that we make contact with the Psychiatric Unit as they may have resources/ advice to offer.

However the fit is less than perfect - Karen describes the work she intends doing (setting up self-help groups for women with drink and drug problems) as 'political', whereas Ann appears to be looking for more professional backup when individual cases prove too demanding for volunteers to handle.

She had no difficulty in gaining permission to work in this way. 'I checked it out with the Principal who was surprisingly positive to the idea of actually spending some time in the Centre as part of my work time, rather than just doing it in my spare time.' Her initial involvement with the Centre went no further than seeing it as an alternative location in which to practice her skills.

> I think my role was very much seen as having a set of skills which I could put into the Centre, so all the structural bit, all the thinking through where this fitted, all those issues weren't my responsibility . . . The thing it boils down to is my role was that I was dealing in the potential of one aspect of the Centre which was somehow in contrast with what was going on at (the hospital) and mental health generally; that could be something very positive and very different offered for women, and it could be done within this particular Centre.

In the process of setting up these groups Karen found she 'was getting more involved with Jo, involved in other things and somehow using my own initiative more, and just accepting the collective aspects of the Centre and not checking out with Ann so much.'

This movement towards greater involvement may be seen as part of a process in which Karen undertook an activity which was sanctioned, and indeed welcomed, by the Centre. In the course of working on this she discovered shared interests with some of the other women, while the

simple fact of spending more time in the Centre forced a closer look at the disjunction between her assumptions of collective organisation, and the reality. The same sort of process was taking place for me; it had been decided that a proposal would be put to the Equal Opportunities Commission for a research grant, and the amount of time I spent in the Centre and talking to people increased. I was also at this time, like many of the other volunteers, using the resources of the Centre to prepare job applications. Ann remarked on the irony of her position, which meant she was often asked to act as referee, and would thus lose many of the 'best' volunteers. It is evident that very many women passed through the Centre and some of the stages which describe a volunteer career have already been indicated. Many of the volunteers were actively seeking work or waiting to take up places on courses, and it was to be expected that there would be a loss of workers for these reasons. However, other women failed to maintain their involvement for reasons which were less obvious. To some extent these reasons can only be considered speculatively, nevertheless, there is some suggestive information. Certainly, for myself, there was a period when I felt that I was having to make an amount of effort in arranging for child minding which hardly seemed justified in terms of what I was getting out of working in the Centre. This changed when I began to interact more with women whose company I enjoyed, and I was drawn closer to the centre of the organisation. For others the negative aspects must be presumed to have outweighed the positive ones.

Jo suggested that there was one over-riding aspect of work in the Centre which could account for women dropping out.

> It was called the WIC so some women came along who were feminist and they expected to find a feminist Centre. And what they found was this rather strange thing which aimed to give advice and support, rather nebulous, and always talked about being careful not to offend the school governors and they couldn't make sense of this, so generally went away, but some stayed around . . .

> The constraint not to cause offence to the school was that bit too heavy and in the end it was offensive.

Because it was now known that the Centre would have to move physically, as Karen remarked, 'The sense of stability - Oh, we'll just go on as before - was changing.' This must be referred back to the original intentions arising from the community project model of the Centre's growth; that over a period of time there would be a change in managerial style from the 'founding figure' leadership of Ann to a collective. No timetable for this change had ever been made explicit, rather there was a sense that in some way a state of readiness would be perceptible which Ann would take as her sign to withdraw.

> There was a time when (the head of the community team) said 'What would you do if you moved out now?', and I said, 'It's not ready to, you know. I've got to set more things up and more people up before I can do that.' So there was the timing of it.

The mechanism through which the change from one organisational style to another was intended to take place was the Management Committee. Here, it was envisaged, participants would learn the processes of taking and sharing responsibility to an extent which would eventually lead naturally to Ann's redundancy. However, the attempt to impose collectivity by fiat only served to make more apparent the strength of the leadership. Ann remarked at the time, 'I've tried to get them (the volunteers) to take things on, but they won't'. This reluctance to assume responsibility may be related to the style of Management Committee meetings which have already been described as consisting largely of information transmission from Ann to the other participants, and which also frequently included requests for people to take responsibility for organising certain activities. The passivity induced by the first type of interaction was reflected in the response to the second - volunteering to take on tasks was rare within meetings and participants had to be approached individually.

There is a reinforcing effect here; because volunteers were not normally party to decision making, and did not have access to some areas of knowledge, they were uncertain what would be required of them and whether they had the capabilities to do what was required. Hence only a few had the confidence to take on a task, and these women were more likely to be graduates or have some other relevant experience on which to draw. It will be remembered (page 199) that this group was not encouraged in more than a limited involvement with the Centre.

The series of meetings which took place during the summer of 1981 (already referred to on page 210) was ostensibly set up to design a new training course for the autumn. They became, however, a 'garbage can' into which was tipped the problem of wastage of volunteers, disquiet about the workings of the Management Committee, reaction to the constraints imposed by close association with the school, and the question of poor relations with some of the other community groups in the area.

One of these meetings identified the following pressures on the Centre:

1) From the school and the local authority - to be non-controversial
2) From other agencies - to be as capable as them or keep out of their territory
3) From volunteers - to have enough, but not too much to do
4) From clients - to do everything, to be reliable
5) From other individuals - to do more of whatever preoccupied them

Although no resolution was reached, solutions were suggested in the form of alternative structures intended to give a broader base to decision making and to facilitate task sharing. When the break for the

summer holidays came some progress in discussion had been made, and the situation was left with 'one more' meeting to be held. The action of the school in closing the Centre had the effect of bringing the problem areas under discussion more sharply into focus, moving the action out into the community, and of precipitating the train of events which led to Ann's decision to resign.

III. PHASE TWO: AUGUST 1981 TO JANUARY 1982 THE TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE

1. Closure and Campaigning

After the WIC was moved by the school and reduced to a pile of boxes in a dirty room there was a general rallying round to re-establish the Centre as quickly as possible, so that the proposed programme of activities for the autumn could take place. People concerned were responsive to the crisis and those in the school were helpful. Ann's contemporary account reads:

> We set to building the Centre up again, volunteers spent hours cleaning the rooms, putting up posters, putting down carpets etc. It took enormous effort from everyone to set the Centre up again. By September 21st the Centre had set itself up as before, the telephone had been installed and we had spent limited funds on changing our address on all the stationery and leaflets. A new publicity programme had been set in motion and hand leaflets had been printed. (The head of community and the school administrator) had helped all they could to provide all that was needed. We were told that we had to remain in these rooms until our new premises on the other side of the building had been renovated. As agreed, a new wall was to be built and we were told that this had been given priority, and would be the first part of the building to be completed.

So far all was well. To some extent this urgency stemmed from a feeling that the Centre had created a momentum which would be lost if action to preserve it was not taken. Ann's retrospective assessment recognises this, but also notes that there would have to be some changes if the potential was to be fully realised.

> The summer before (the Centre) was closed I think was one of its most active. It was on a high then, there was a lot going on. It's like a lot of the old work had started filtering through, and if it had carried on at that level I think it'd have a lot more strength, a lot more contacts. Just given more freedom and it would have, I think, gone on to lots of different things.

The minutes of the first Management Committee meeting held in the new premises do, in fact, show more potential for action than action itself. Three of the groups had come to the end of their life; the single parent's group 'needs someone to co-ordinate it', the menopause support group 'has served its purpose', and clients for legal advice were to be referred elsewhere in recognition of the fact that this particular service was available at a number of other locations in the area. Three projected groups were overtaken by events and failed to start, as did the new training course. It was agreed that a local women's group could hold their meetings in the Centre, 'although some explanation would have to be made about the difficulties which could arise if the name of the Centre is associated with campaigning.' In the event, this group did not start meeting in the Centre until it had relocated in independent premises where the restriction on campaigning did not apply.

The point that the move, in itself, did not lead to any questioning of the social location and organisational formof the Centre, is exampled by the foregoing extracts from the minutes, and also by two other statements made at the same meeting. An application was to be made for a full-time worker under the Community Enterprise Programme (CEP) and the job description for this post read, 'Such a person would be responsible for single-parent groups and especially the baby sitting service.' In other words, it was presumed that the appointee would slot into a vacant position within the organisation as it then was - there was no suggestion that she might be involved in a discussion of

the scope of her job. The second statement was about the move itself: 'Nothing can be done now but it is important not to just let it happen without protest.'

As it turned out the move was only the beginning of a series of events which were far-reaching in their consequences. On September 23rd, two days after the Centre had declared itself ready for action, Ann attended a social event at the School. Here she was told by the Head of Community that the Centre would have to close. An alternative use for the Annexe as a centre for the unemployed was proposed by the Council, and it was part of the deal that the School would only receive the funding for this development if the Centre ceased to exist. Ann recorded:

> He (the Head of Community) could not say who made the decision or why. All he understood was the either/or blackmail of the situation, and given that, Simpson would drop the Centre like a hot coal in favour of their new project for the Annexe and they were very sorry about it.

Events at this time and in the period immediately following it were fast-moving and confused; there is variation in individual accounts and it is difficult to reconstruct an exact sequence of events. The political facts of the situation were not clear at that time although it was later suggested that one member of the City Council was opposed to the WIC and was prepared to veto the Council grant unless the Centre ceased operation.

The following evening an emergency meeting of such members of the Management Committee as could be assembled at short notice took place. The announcement of closure had come totally without warning and much of the meeting was taken up with trying to work out who was behind the move and why. As there was so little information available the best tactic for the moment appeared to be to stay put and attempt to carry on as usual, if this were possible, while exploring the extent of

support for the Centre among other local agencies. This proved to be an interesting and revealing exercise. The senior staff of the School's main preoccupation was with securing the funding and the ensuing prestige attached to a large scale project; for them the WIC was a minor irritation standing in the way of this. Within the team of community workers reaction was mixed. Some saw it as a project which had grown too big and too obviously political, others described it as the only really successful and exciting piece of community work which had been done. One consequence of the closure was to stimulate considerable debate within the community team as to the proper direction of their work.

These reactions were, perhaps, predictable. More support was anticipated from other agencies and groups in the area. This did not turn out to be the case. Support was at best muted, and the reaction from the Benefits Centre was overtly hostile. The criticisms stemmed from a perception of the Centre as poorly integrated with other related areas of work, conversely many aspects of the Centre's work had a low visibility to outsiders. In order to discuss these responses it was decided to hold the 'last', deferred meeting (page 223). These meetings had started as an offshoot of the Management Committee, but by this time it had become clear that the main discussants were Ann, Karen, Jo and myself. It had been hoped that it would be possible to effect a restructuring of the Centre which would take into account the criticisms being made of it, and thus to anticipate a better basis for support from other agencies, within the existing framework. Essential to this was the proposal that, organisationally, the Centre was redefined as a collective - the committee would be a participative rather than a representative body. However, this proposal was unacceptable to Ann and there appeared to be no suitable compromise solution. After a long and painful meeting she decided to resign

from her position in the Centre and ask for redeployment in another capacity.

Ann made this announcement at the next meeting of the Management Committee where she also reported that she was being threatened with suspension or sacking if she became involved in any form of protest over the closure. However, the rest of the participants at that meeting were not subject to the same sanctions and there was a general feeling that we had worked for long enough under the constraints of the present situation. It was agreed that the best possible outcome would be if ways and means could be found for the Centre to beoome independent, but two other options were also considered worth exploring - the School was reportedly trying to arrange accommodation with a nearby Church Social Centre, or we could remain in the Annexe and become part of the Unemployment Centre.

Later the same day Karen, Jo and I met again in a pub and came to a decision to protest at the closure and to mount a campaign in an attempt to save the Centre. As Karen remembered it:

> The decision was - do we fight this as an issue with the Council, which would involve things like petitions and do we try to go independent? And that seemed like an incredible leap, just unobtainable. And I think what we decided to do was to do it just for the hell of it.

Jo's recollection, from the perspective of a paid worker who had been spending a lot of time in meetings arguing unsuccessfully with the School was less enthusiastic.

> I was very low, very fed up. And Karen suddenly saying, 'Well, what are we going to do? I think we ought to picket the Council House and do this and do that.' I felt got at at the time because if anyone was to do that bit - well it was being directed at me and all that stuff was so contrary to my nature. But somebody had to say that, that was the other side of it, or else we would literally have died.

The next morning, in the Centre, I drafted, duplicated and distributed copies of a petition. We had also all taken on the task of lobbying

other community groups in the area for their support, and through this process of making contact with relevant organisations a great deal of previously unavailable information was collected in a short time about the social standing and location of the Centre. In fact, it is truer to say that this information was available, but until the changes brought about by recent events, the group had not defined themselves as people for whom it was useful or necessary, and had therefore not sought to acquire it. In particular, a conversation Karen had with White (a member of another community group in the area) proved crucial. He referred to a previous application the Centre had made to the Cadbury charities.

> Last time we'd applied for Cadbury money they'd asked round other groups and the other groups had given us the thumbs down, because of the connection with the School, because of the political aspect of it, and because we weren't really part of anything else, just sort of existed. And I was asking what the chances were, and so really if you like it was White who got us the money. What he was saying was 'If you put it in again and emphasise those changes this guy will come round and ask the other groups, and if he gets a favourable report then the chances were we would get the money.' That was really significant because at that point we wouldn't have applied to Cadbury again because we'd been refused. So we put the application in again and by that time, because of the work we'd done the other groups said, 'Yes, we think this is a really good idea, they should be supported.' And that was where the money came from, It was that lunch time I think - it suddenly seemed it wasn't just doing it for the hell of it.

Until that point no one in the group had been aware that charitable bodies made these kinds of enquiries when assessing an application for funding. The importance of developing good working relations with other relevant professionals was only now fully appreciated.

The promise of Cadbury money arrived in December 1981. The four months of activity which led up to that point involved a number of changes in organisational style and emphasis from the previous period. The most immediately obvious of these was that the campaign to protest against the closure of the Centre moved the action into a much more

public arena, engaging with the Council and the local newspaper.

The first report to appear in the local press (on 9th October 1981) includes the School's point of view.

> College administration officer said, 'I have the utmost respect for the Centre. I think it is one of the best community development projects that has come out of Simpson School.' But he confirmed that the Centre had been told to leave as it did not fit in with the 'overall conception of the Annexe project as a 16 plus training centre.' He added, 'I do not think the Centre will have to close down its services. It is presently up for discussion and we are negotiating for accomodation close by.' But another worker at the Centre accused the college of disowning the type of people it was intended to help. 'We're determined to fight this' she said. While discussions take place the women are searching for new premises.

During the week which followed a great deal of work went into raising the petition, exploring the potential support among local councillors and discovering the procedural aspects of presenting a petition to Council. Karen reported her conversation with a sympathetic Labour councillor: 'What he said was, "Well, if I support it it'll be the kiss of death", and told us who to try and get on our side.'

In other aspects of this campaign, however, our behaviour was less informed and at times it was downright naive. For example, in drawing up the petition I had attempted a 'vote catching' style, not appreciating how strange this would sound when read out in the Council chamber. Of more importance was the fact that the group became involved in a fundamental discussion of tactics immediately before the Council meeting and arrived too late to engage in any effective lobbying. This state of affairs arose because one woman arrived with new information from the school administrator, namely, that if a demonstration took place we would be thrown out tomorrow. Could it then possibly do any good? The fact that this was something of a red herring since the petition would be presented to Council in any case did not prevent the issue being given time-consuming consideration.

In part this was due to the forceful way in which the argument was presented, but it also reflected a change in the style of discussion between group members. Dissension and difference were taken seriously and explored for the possibility of compromise or accomodation. The proposition was put that the demonstration was 'non-productive , indeed suicidal, and that rather than kill ourselves off we should go along with the School's offer to move us into the Church Social Centre'. In response to this it was pointed out that the offer had only been made after we had started to make a fuss, that a lot of work had already been done, including some 750 signatures to the petition, and that in essence it was too late to think about backing down now. Moreover there was nothing definite about the offer, but we were anyway negotiating independently and directly with the vicar. In this case no compromise was possible in the time available and the woman who had brought the information left, while the rest of the group moved on to the Council House.

The fact that this internal discussion was allowed to take up time which might have been more appropriately and usefully spent in the public arena did not, I think, occur to anyone until the group finally reached the Council House to find that other petitioning groups had been waving banners and handing out leaflets to members of Council as they arrived. We were too late to do anything beyond a brief chat with local reporters.

The presenting councillor spoke to the petition for perhaps two minutes, giving a list of the Centre's activities, drawing attention to the fact that Social Services were increasingly relying on voluntary bodies and pointing out that no demands were being made on Council beyond the request for premises. He 'hoped a way could be found to accomodate this service'. The matter was referred to the 'appropriate committee'. It was something of an anticlimax. Given the formal nature of the proceedings it was unlikely that any action at this time

would have made any difference to the outcome. However, while this view can be only conjectural what is clear is that the amount of activity taking place at this time, together with the dislocated nature of the Centre, were important in securing the funding from the Cadbury charities. Jo recalled:

> When I think of it it all feels very accidental . . . how we got the Cadbury money is because it was just at the right time. In the beginning if we'd wanted to go independent we would definitely not have got it because they wouldn't have been interested. Also if we had been a full-fledged Women's Centre on a feminist basis they wouldn't have touched it with a barge-pole. But because we were in between, we'd been chucked out be the local authority - which had its appeal - we were a local, community based group. O.K., it was just for women, but it was a locally based thing. It was ideal, so we got it.

This account describes a position which it would seem almost impossible to engineer by design. What it does refer to by implication is the importance and value of the collective which formed in response to these events and which held together despite a number of set-backs and disappointments during the period the Centre was non-operational. Jo also commented 'I think that was why Cadbury gave it to us - because we were seen to be a living organisation'.

2. The Formation of the Collective

An important part of the lobbying activity which was taking place was a conscious attempt to broaden the base of community involvement in the Centre. While other women active in the community were aware of the existence of the Centre, for the most part their links with it had been rather tenuous. One social worker with whom I discussed this said that she had seen the Centre as 'fiercely independent' in its early days. However, it was now clear that for the Centre to continue to exist in any form it was necessary to open it up as far as possible. In other words, to increase the 'ownership' of the Centre by encouraging more women to become involved in its future development, and thus at the same

time to increase its level of support by increasing the number of women for whom the question of its continuance was of some importance. To this end a meeting was organised outside the usual run of Management Committee meetings. It was held in Jo's home in the evening and efforts were made to get as many women to attend as possible. At this point negotiations with the vicar of St. John's were moving forward and the previous Management Committee meeting had considered this to be the Centre's only immediate option. The move was expected to take place within the next few weeks when the details of the rooms and telephone lines were worked out. The 'extraordinary' meeting considered the implications of this move in greater detail and attempted to understand what the formulation of an independent and collective existence for the Centre would involve.

Twelve women attended this meeting. All had had some contact with the Centre before, but for five it had been slight and/or recent in origin, and for one it represented a return after an absence of several months. Ann had said she did not intend to come to this meeting, but evidently changed her mind and instead used the occasion to announce her resignation again and the reasons for it more formally. The minutes recorded:

> She explained that there were many reasons for this, some of which were to do with not having the energy to set up the Centre yet again, and with the feeling that it was the right time to hand over responsibility to a group of people rather than carrying all the responsibility herself.

The idea of 'responsibility' was a key theme in the discussion. It was cited in relation to one of the other developments which was taking place in parallel at this time; that of employing a full-time worker through the Community Enterprise Programme. This had reached the stage where preliminary inquiries had been made and it was now necessary for the sponsorship forms to be signed and arrangements made for the associated administrative tasks. It was apparent that, had she not

resigned, Ann would have assumed this as her job and consequently was insistent about the need for someone to take on the responsibility. At this time I was feeling strongly that there needed to be a paid co-ordinator to hold the collective together and to act as a focus for communication. I therefore felt that such a good opportunity should not be wasted, and that probably the amount of 'responsibility' involved was not going to be so great. Accordingly, I suggested to Iris that we get together the next day to fill in the forms. This was done and the proposal went ahead.

In the interval before this worker could be appointed it seemed in some sense obvious that Jo, as the only paid worker, would step into the gap created by Ann's departure and take on a co-ordinating role. However, she was very clear that she did not want to be involved in a simple transfer of personnel without a concomitant change in the way the Centre was organised. The minutes of the meeting recorded Jo as saying:

> She was not prepared to take on Ann's role, as she was employed as a counsellor and wished to carry on that work based at the Centre, alongside other groups and individuals who would also use the Centre as a base. Each of these individuals or groups would have a sayin the management of the Centre and take some of the responsibility for, for example, the appointment and supervision of paid workers and volunteers in the Centre.

In the next stage in the Centre's history, when it was effectively homeless, Jo's presence was an important factor in maintaining a fragile continuity. At the same time her adamant refusal to take up a central position was crucial to facilitating the development of the collective organisation.

In this meeting there was heated debate about whether the move to St John's was advisable, even though the last meeting had identified it as the only viable short-term option. This, in part, involved a consideration of how the physical and social environment could affect

activities, and in part arose from a feeling that this was effectively 'selling out' to the School and would mean an end to the protest campaign. In particular, the fact that it was a religious organisation was talked through - to what extent would this in itself define the characteristics of the Centre? Those who had had personal contact with the vicar and the Social Centre were inclined to think that this aspect was less important than might be supposed; the vicar was described as very open to community activities and very keen to accomodate the Centre. However, there was no doubt that the setting would be in some way constraining, and that simply in terms of the amount of space available, the Centre could probably be little more than an office. It was unlikely that there would be any capacity for group work, and for some participants this was of crucial importance. Karen, in particular, felt that an inability to engage in group work would mean that it would not really be a Women's Centre. The alternative course of action suggested was a sit-in in the existing premises, although some participants felt that the cold reality of spending nights in the Annexe was demanding of more energy and enthusiasm than actually existed. Eventually a vote was taken and it was decided by five to three (with some abstentions) to move into St. John's, but to view it strictly as a temporary base from which to work towards independence.

Accordingly, at the beginning of November 1981, a campaign was launched to protest about the way the Centre was being treated and to fund-raise with the intention of re-establishment on an independent footing. Letters were sent to a large number of local contacts asking them to write to the Council recording their protest and the following report appeared in the local press.

> Women's help group fights closure cuts
>
> Workers at Greystone Women's Information Centre have launched a fund-raising campaign in a bid to save it from closure. They say the Centre which is being forced to quit its offices in the Annexe of Simpson

> School and Community College must be self-financing if it is to survive. At the moment it is financed by the city council and charities.
> The Centre is being moved to make way for a youth unemployment scheme and the workers say that the new premises which have been found next door at St. John's church are inadequate. One of the workers, Iris, said the Centre would have to close because there was not enough space at St. John's to run all its activities.
> Jo, a counsellor, said in the past two years the Centre had provided support and advice and set up self-help groups for women and their families. 'We see St. John's as a temporary base and will use the time to strengthen our resources and work towards independence.' She said the Centre was hoping for grants from firms and charities to help it pay for better premises.

An open invitation was sent out to anyone 'interested in the future of the Centre and the possibility of working as a collective', and the subsequent meeting was attended by about 15 women, including some who were working in other community groups. There was a good deal of support for some kind of cooperative venture and the possibility of shared premises with one or more of these groups was seriously considered. Meanwhile, the move into St. John's was delayed because of some 'problems with the erection of partitions' in the space the Centre was supposed to occupy. In the event these partitions were never erected and the Centre was never established within St. John's. It continued to maintain a presence, and a limbo-like existence within the Annexe while alterations to this building for the new project went on, expecting from day to day to find access to the office denied. All the planned developments and the group work activities ceased for the time being.

In other areas, however, positive progress was being made. The effect of the publicity campaign was to greatly enhance the visibility of the Centre's existence within the city, and this was rewarded with strong support from community groups and individuals. A working collective was now established, following the open meeting and the meetings were well attended and enjoyable. When I talked

later with Jo about them she remarked:

> There was quite a mixture of women, some of them we've never seen again, but they were there for quite a few weeks. And I think, 'Why did they come?' Because it was important to them that there should be a Women's Centre or because they got something with being with other women.

A further effect of this increased community support was that encouraging feed-back was being received from the two large charitable trusts to whom reapplication had been made, and the application for a CEP worker had been accepted and was currently being advertised. It appeared that the one large task remaining was to find suitable premises to rent. When this was discussed the possibility of a city centre location was considered, but it was felt that this could have the effect of changing the nature of the Centre into something more like a Citizen's Advice Bureau, and that it was preferable to try to remain within the locality.

All this activity also served to cause some embarrassment to the local council. After a protest letter naming a particular councillor had been circulated, Jo and Ann were summoned and asked to retract the allegation that it was in fact his dislike for the Centre and its activities which had been the impetus behind the attempts to remove it. The letter was indeed strongly worded. In part it read:

> The Education Department have given us only two weeks to remove from our premises in the Annexe and have failed to give any logical reason for this action against the Centre . . . This is a deplorable situation, particularly as it seems that this only happened because the word 'Women' is attached to the name of the Centre.

Jo responded to the request to withdraw the allegation by remarking, 'If the allegation is not true, then (the councillor) must support the Centre.' This was met with the rejoinder that it was 'a lot of fuss about a trivial matter'. It seems clear that the council were surprised and discomfited by the extent of the reaction to their behaviour, and this councillor announced that he was 'working very hard

to get us taken on by Social Services.' Meanwhile, the petition was referred to the Education sub-committee which met on 6th November and referred the matter to the Social Services sub-committee.

While these deliberations were taking place about the future of the Centre within the Council, another event occurred which, although it had no direct connection with the Centre, was more instrumental in affecting what happened in the following weeks. A strike of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) closed the school buildings and involved us, with others, in a decision not to cross the picket line. Thus, although we were still able to gain access to the Annexe, nobody wanted to break the strike, and so collective meetings were held in St. John's. Jo and others tried to use this building as a base to keep the Centre going, but it was almost impossible since the School's community team had also taken over this space and were overflowing from it themselves. One morning I went in and found it was impossible to remain in St. John's - there was just no room to do anything. The Centre was more effectively closed by the NUPE strike than by any of the actions taken so far by the School or the Council. On the other hand, a strong collective of interested and involved women had evolved with considerable facility. This is interesting, since before the difficulties with the School arose the low level of volunteer support for the Centre was a persistent problem.

When I discussed this phenomenon later with Karen she suggested that, 'rather than the collective creating cohesion, the cohesion was already there'. In this sense it can be argued that the way in which the Centre had been structured previously had had the effect of suppressing a collective consensus between women working in the community which was there, ready to be activated. Two other points must be made here. These events took place from a baseline of nothing - a situation where the Centre was expected to quietly fade away - so that

any improvement from that position was a real gain, and also, because there were no guidelines or prescriptions for appropriate behaviour in the situation, people were able to operate in ways which were most comfortable for them - it was all welcomed and useful. Sally was an example of this. She worked in the School and had been very active in the early days before dropping out completely. She now reappeared and put in a great deal of effort searching for suitable premises. This took a long time but was eventually accomplished, after which she again faded from the scene. As well, since nothing specific was expected of anyone, individuals found that they were able to take on tasks without experiencing much in the way of fear of failure. In conversation Karen talked about how the feeling of cohesiveness provided the support for her to take things on and to take risks. She also recognised how her own commitment to the idea of the Women's Centre was an essential ingredient in the support-seeking activities she engaged in - that she was able, because of this, to engage with and convince people with whom she had had only minimal contact before. Throughout this period there was a feeling of innovation, excitement and improvisation. These facets of action were often referred to as 'accidental' or 'fortuitous'. For example, Jo talked about the way the Cadbury funding was obtained in these terms:

> It all felt very accidental. Karen got this piece of information and said, 'Why don't you contact so and so?' Well, worth a try, we did and that was what it was like. None of this great tedium of, 'Let's get the application form.'

In these circumstances the particularities of actions and outcomes can only be understood in terms of the interactions of skills and values of the individuals who chose to become involved, with the parts of the environment to which they directed their attention.

The meetings which took place during November and December that year show a number of differences from the earlier Management Committees.

They took place more often and were better attended - up to 15 women. It was also noticeable that there was a move from women attending as representatives of other agencies to attendance as interested individuals who might or might not be also involved with other community or women's groups. Of necessity the prevailing themes in the discussion were different. The former activities of the Centre - drop-ins, conselling and group work - had ceased, and instead the practicalities of premises and funding were uppermost. Contacts with other individuals and groups were being explored and developed to see how far mutually useful and rewarding interaction could take place. This was particularly apparent in the number of different combinations of joint premises which it was suggested should be investigated. What was taking place at this time was a testing out of the various forms which reconstruction could take. Thus, what could be inferred about the future nature of the Centre if it was located in association with one group or another? What implications were there in applying for charitable status? and so on. The need to fully explore how these ideas could be worked out and translated into action led to the decision to hold an all-day workshop in January.

3. <u>New Premises and a New Worker</u>

By December encouraging responses were being received from two of the charities to whom applications for funding had been made. In particular it now seemed very likely that a large amount of money would be provided by the Cadbury charities. The Gulbenkian Foundation had also made a favourable response and, in relation to this, discussions with the Social Services department indicated that, while there was little likelihood of money directly from them, they were prepared to give support to the Centre's application. All this, together with the fact that the CEP post had been apporved and was currently being

advertised, was clear indication that, in some quarters at least, the work and the collective style of working of those involved in the Women's Centre was recognised as appropriate and legitimate. There remained the question of suitable premises from which to develop the potential which now appeared to exist. It is probably impossible to estimate whether more time and energy went into searching for premises or into securing a financial base - both were obviously demanding activities, and both were essential for the achievement of an independent existence - but at the time it felt as if persuading charitable trusts to part with money was easy compared with the process of finding somewhere to set up shop. Eventually, at the beginning of 1982, the lease of a council-owned shop immediately opposite the Annexe became available and the collective decided that, in terms of size and position, it was close to the ideal. There were also many drawbacks - for example, flooded cellars - and a great deal of time and work was still necessary before the Centre could be described as re-established, but there is no doubt that the identification of these premises was important in keeping enthusiasm and action going.

By this time it was known that Cadbury's would provide funding to the extent of £12,000 over two years to pay for rent and running costs, and to employ a part-time co-ordinator. At the next meeting there was general agreement that this post should go to Iris; there was no question that there should be interviews in order to uncover the 'best' candidate, it was rather that it was now possible to acknowledge more tangibly the work that Iris was already doing. On the other hand there was a great deal of discussion about how the interviews for the CEP post would be conducted and what sort of a woman we wanted to appoint. In this case, because of the qualifying conditions, there was no internal candidate. (Applicants had to be registered as unemployed for six months if they were under 25, for 12 months if they were older.)

The post was termed 'Project Co-ordinator' and the description which was circulated of the job carried with it the legacy of the Centre's antecedents in community work.

> The main work of the Project Co-ordinator will be to take responsibility for the co-ordination and organisation of new projects within the Women's Information Centre. The underlying aim of this role will be to help set up new projects or groups, and to encourage volunteers to take over the eventual running of these projects, in line with the Centre's aims of self-help. The main areas of work will involve working with single parents, unemployed women, informal adult education with local mothers and the training of volunteers. The applicant would be expected to be able to work on her own initiative as well as with other people, and to show enthusiasm towards the aims of the Centre which is in the process of reforming itself as a collective.

However, it became clear in the pre-interview discussion between members of the collective that more emphasis would be placed on personal style and enthusiasm for the project than on any specific skills or interests. Among the areas which individuals decided they wanted to ask about were approaches to collective working, how the applicant had been spending her time while unemployed, and how she would like to see the Centre developing. It was decided that the interviews would be conducted by as many members of the collective who were available (which turned out to be six), and that we should attempt to be fairly tough in recognition of the fact that the job would be demanding, requiring the ability to deal with a variety of people. One member, in particular, was adamant that we should not consider experience in community work sufficient qualification, without also requiring some evidence of commitment to feminism. Sheila, who made this point, had recently moved from London where she had been active in a Women's Centre which was far more overtly feminist than was in any way possible, or even seriously considered, while operating as an offshoot of a Community College.

Some discomfort came from the realisation that it was only possible to look at three of the candidates at all seriously. In part this again arose because of the qualifying conditions, strictly we were

not supposed to undertake our own advertising and all applications had to be made through the Job Centre. This meant that a large proportion had to be rejected, either because they were men or because they lacked any appropriate qualities. In the event one of the candidates only wanted to work part-time and was therefore excluded. Of the two who remained both could be seen as capable of doing the job, although Stella was more experienced than Linda, who had not had a paid job since she graduated the previous year. The choice was a difficult one, but the balance of feeling was in favour of Linda. This was in some way because of her relative inexperience which was seen as an advantage in two ways - that she had more energy to bring to the job, and that her views were less firmly worked out than Stella's which seemed to imply that collective working would come more easily. The interviewers were also very impressed with her relaxed personal style, which was felt to be an important attribute in relating to a wide range of people. It was decided by five to one to offer the job to Linda, which she subsequently accepted. The one person who wanted to appoint Stella did so on the basis that she felt the more experienced woman would in some way be 'better' for the Centre, although she herself preferred Linda.

At the same time as this encouraging progress was being made in one direction the saga of the new premises was far from over. The shop had already been surveyed and some major building work identified, but before the repairs could start another hurdle was discovered. As the shop had been a second-hand business a request for change of use would have to be submitted to the Council in order to use it for anything else. This appeared to be far from a formality, and the available information indicated that councillors would again have to be persuaded. A collective meeting discussed whether it was possible to just move in and hope for the best, but decided that too much attention was already

directed at the Centre and that there was no option in this case but to play it straight. Accordingly Jo went to see someone in the Planning department.

> She said, 'No, don't apply for change of use, you'll not get it. You'll waste £40 on the application and you won't get it.' The collective had decided we should just go ahead and apply for change of use, we didn't realise it would be £40. So I go on this collective decision and there was this woman saying you don't stand a chance. So we applied and we got it and if we'd obeyed everyone's advice we wouldn't have got it.

In this context Jo also talked about the strain of keeping going during this period.

> What I remember about the last twelve months, especially the winter months, is just keeping going. A couple of weeks going to collect my pay packet thinking, 'Perhaps I should resign, this isn't right.' I wasn't doing work 'cos I couldn't get in.[4] There was nothing, waiting to hear about the money, premises, thinking, 'This is stupid' . . . But there was always just enough hope, just enough maybe, to keep going. I think the other part of it was that we had reformed as a collective and we were meeting as a collective, and when we did meet for me that felt good.

The day-long workshop held at the end of January 1982 was one of the more positive and enjoyable occasions. It was held with the intention of trying to find out how much support for the new Centre there might be, and from this to work out ways of achieving the kind of Centre people appeared to want. Particular emphasis was placed on discovering the range of contacts which already existed, and to think about ways in which these contacts could be articulated and extended. Some thirty women attended the workshop, and eleven already existing user groups were identified, with another 15 who might wish to become users. Here it is worth quoting at length from Jo's report of the day, since it admirably describes the numerous contradictions contained within the participants' aims and expectations.

4. The NUPE strike.

We talked about what sort of Centre we wanted, and we came up with two main answers. In the first place we wanted a Centre which would feel welcoming, where women could drop in for a cup of coffee with no more complicated reason than wanting to meet and talk with other women. The emphasis was on contact, communication, a meeting place. Secondly, being realistic, many of us felt that we often need an excuse, a reason, to call into a strange building peopled by unknown women, and therefore we wanted a place where things would be happening in a structured and timetabled way. We came up with a long list of all the possibilities.

Our assumption that we wanted to be non-hierarchical involved us in a long discussion about the difference between participating in the Centre by being a user, and participating by being an organiser and decision-maker. We decided this was and would probably continue to be a problem. Practical difficulties of baby-sitters and not over-sympathetic husbands, would make it difficult for many women to come to collective meetings, even if they felt motivated to do so to in order to represent their particular group. Alongside acknowledgement of this fact was the statement that we did not want to perpetuate the 'serving' role of women by having a system which resulted in one group of women clearing up after or taking responsibility for another group.

Children should be welcome and be made to feel welcome, as only in that way will women who are mothers feel welcome. At the same time, a woman who has carved out a space in the week for herself, free of the demands of kids, should not then be expected to run a creche. We thought there might be some difficulties in meeting both these needs.

There was some concern about how we would 'attract' women to use the Centre. It was pointed out that there was always this mythical group of women for whom the Centre exists, and they're always 'out there', and never in the Centre. As we had, by this time 30 women present in the room, it was true to say that if we were all in the Centre at one time it would be full. It is more realistic to start from the women who do show their interest by turning up and hoping that the life and activity these women create will, in itself, attract other women.

The words 'isolation' and 'contact' were used often. The Centre would have a responsibility to be a resource for what's happening where, who's meeting and when.

Should the Centre aim to offer specialised knowledge and advice or act mainly as a referral agency in advice giving? Past experience has made us wary of setting ourselves up as 'expert' in any field. Nevertheless it is also true that some agencies which offer very good professional advice do not and cannot specialise in areas of particular relevance to women. It was felt that while the Centre should not take upon itself the role of expert in, for example, legal matters, it should nevertheless concern itself with gathering information and evidence on matters of law and the

social security system directly related to women. Furthermore, now that there are no ties with the local authority, the Centre should be concerned with campaigning as and when appropriate.

Our energy and enthusiasm were somewhat curtailed by the knowledge that we do not have a definite 'yes' for the premises we want to move into. The Centre at the moment is still in the future and the next move depends on the decision of the Council on whether or not they grant permission for change of use. If the answer is 'yes' its all systems go and a house-warming party in March. We have money from Cadbury's for two years, one full-time and two part-time workers and two Community Enterprise trainees, plus lots of women . . .

IV. Phase Three: January 1982 to February 1983

Going It Alone

The success of the workshop, in terms of the number of participants and the amount of energy it produced, gave a much needed boost to those women who were most closely involved with the difficulties of keeping the Centre in existence. In particular, it was encouraging that so many busy and over-committed women felt it important enough to give their support and, through their contacts with other community groups, the implied support of greater numbers. Moreover, in spite of the contradictions identified in Jo's report, there was a degree of consensus about the direction the Centre should take in the future, differences being more ones of emphases than of fundamentals. However, this general homogeneity of opinion must in part, at least, be seen as due to the self-selected nature of the participants. It became clear in the following weeks, when attempts were made to implement the suggestions made at the workshop, that it was an essentially theoretical consensus and a commitment at a distance. That is, these women were able and very willing to be involved in the Centre on an occasional basis, but typically were already in work situations which did not allow them to spend time developing the Centre

in a day-to-day sense. This point was made very clearly at the next meeting of the collective, at the beginning of February, where there was no one present except the paid workers who could work regularly in the Centre.

This meeting was informed that the Council had passed the application for change of use of the shop, and that therefore the Centre could open as soon as the lease was signed. This was expected to take place within the next couple of weeks. I had expected there to be some general euphoria at this news, but although it obviously meant a great deal to Jo, the atmosphere was more indicative of an awareness of the responsibilities which went with becoming 'legitimate' than the relative freedom to act that it also implied. The remainder of the meeting attempted to deal with matters which would affect the future running of the Centre. The question of how, exactly, volunteers could be involved with the Centre was discussed yet again. It was reported that there were a number of women who were able to devote some time to this, but who were not able to be present at evening meetings. It was therefore suggested that another meeting be held during the day specifically for them, indicating that the women who would be working in the Centre were, by and large, quite different from those who would be attending collective meetings. Other differences were also apparent. It was decided that in future collective meetings would be held alternately at 6.30 p.m., for those who preferred to come straight from work, and at 7.30 p.m., for those who had children and preferred to come out later, and also that there should be a separation between meetings which considered policy and general principles, and those which dealt with the 'nitty-gritty' of the everyday work. By no means all of these suggested changes were implemented for very long but the discussion of them was important in the way that it focussed on the different ways different women engaged with the Centre.

1. Reappraisals of Policy

In these discussions the presence of the newly appointed Community Programme worker (Linda) was important. She brought with her the experience of a Women's Centre in another town, and consequently some viewpoints and perspectives which had already been worked out in that setting. For example, she suggested, and it was agreed, that in future women who worked in the Centre would be described as 'workers' and not as 'volunteers', and, in the same vein, that the Centre should simply be known as 'Greystone Women's Centre' - dropping 'Information' from its name. Both these changes were indicative of a move away from the agency model with staff and volunteers who dealt with clients, towards something in which these distinctions were less clear cut and which embodied a more genuinely participative approach. These proposals were welcomed and agreed at this point, although the process of actually working out how they were best operationalised and put into practice was less straightforward. Nevertheless, the fact that there was a general consensus about trying to work in a more democratic and participative way provided an important value for the future.

There is no doubt that one of the effects of Linda's appointment was to open some of the discussions on matters of policy and to challenge some of the ways of working which had not previously been examined. At this particular meeting she was very concerned about the way confidential records were kept, feeling that treating women who used the Centre for information and advice as 'clients' was demeaning to them. The other point of view (and the one which had prevailed in the past) was based on a more pragmatic approach - namely that if a woman came to the Centre on several different occasions it was likely that she would see different workers. The intentions behind the record keeping were to save her the distress of repeating her 'story' from scratch each time, and to record any interactions with other agencies in relation to

her problem. In this instance two equally well-intentioned principles were being invoked as a basis for action. The fact that the action-outcome of one was contradictory to the other made resolution difficult and it was decided to defer the issue for longer discussion at another time. This discussion did not in fact take place in collective meetings. When I later talked to Linda about it she said:

> To me still the most important thing, if women come in looking for something and they walk through the door and say, 'Are you social workers?' to be able to say 'No', and see the relief on their faces is just really important. And I'm so glad we don't have any of this sort of documentation of case records any more; it gave me the creeps when I first arrived.
>
> (When did they finally get dumped?)
>
> About three months ago (June 1982) when Jo and I threw them all in black plastic sacks.
>
> (Did you and Jo make that decision together?)
>
> Yes, more or less. I was the one pushing for it, but I mean Jo agreed.

This form of decision making is one illustration of the difficulties which arose in the working out of the relationship between the collective and the workers - both paid and unpaid. The collective could have continued to debate matters of principle at length - those actually working in the Centre faced a constant reminder of the issues at stake.

The question of whether or not a Women's Centre was necessarily or inevitably identical with a feminist centre was one which had always been implicit in discussions and practices, but was only now coming out into the open. For example, Linda was very surprised to find that no discussion had ever taken place or policy been worked out towards the occasional men who came into the Centre. Indeed, the question had never arisen in this form; men had in the past come in, typically for benefits advice, and had been dealt with. As Ann saw it:

> The fact that it was called the Women's Information Centre obviously meant that it was for women. Only those men who felt they had to give support, or there

> were a couple of Asian men who came in with their wives, and that was it. It didn't have to be an issue.

This is perhaps an over simplification of the situation. While the Centre was closely associated with the School some men, such as the Head of community work, assumed a 'right' to come into the Centre whenever they felt it necessary, while others, such as the community photographer, were accepted as part of the local network and came in for 'chats'. In the new premises the concept of 'women only' was much more consciously adopted, but there were still circumstances where pragmatic compromises were necessary, such as the period when the (male) builders co-op were carrying out repairs and alterations to the building.

Even when there was a clear policy towards non-essential men, the process of operating it at a personal level with women (and men) to whom the idea was new, was not without difficulties. Jo described an incident where the boy-friend of a new worker was hanging about waiting for her.

> Linda said, 'You take her on one side and say this is women only'. And I felt awful. She would feel embarrassed that she'd allowed him in here and I felt it's my fault because I didn't say to her, 'By the way, it's women only here, because there aren't many women only spaces and we feel it would be useful if this was just for women.' I'd literally just forgotten to say this, and therefore I take the responsibility for making her feel alright about the fact that this man was here, and this was because I hadn't made it clear, and also it is a policy. I think to get round it we have to do that, we will have to state our case, and you can't stick a notice on the door. I think you'd get hassled, quite honestly.

This incident is indicative of a more general point. Among the women who used the Centre were those for whom feminism was an accepted and important part of their lives, and those for whom the ideas were new, and therefore possibly either threatening or irrelevent. Moreover, while there had been a reaction away from the client/professional model

which typified the early days of the Centre, the problems raised by this had not gone away. The differences between the middle-class and the local women were in many ways the same as those between the feminists and non-feminists. Everyone I spoke to, while differing in the details of their analysis of the situation and suggested solutions, was aware of this as a central issue.

Linda's view was that,

> In any sized town you'd expect there to be a reasonable number of unemployed feminists, and I've increasingly come to the viewpoint that it's necessary for feminist women to be involved in the Women's Centre. To be even talking about attracting other women - in inverted commas - I mean it's a bit of a farce really. In fact, a Women's Centre can be O.K. just to provide a service for feminist women, and then hopefully other things will happen. It doesn't have to be the other way round. I think the Women's Centre's fine to be a resource for the women that use it.

Jo had a rather different perspective.

> I think what feminism hasn't managed to do is to carry working class women along with it, or to speak in a language which has relevance. Or perhaps it has relevance but those women don't pick it up consciously except on very specific issues such as violence. What I see as a potentially big issue is how the new Centre actually involves all sorts of women and not just the feminists . . . Karen said something the other day which I hadn't thought of in those terms. She said she wanted it to be a <u>women's</u> Centre, not a feminist's Centre, which I thought was very clear. I thought, 'Yes, that's what I'm committed to.'

The identification of these two groups had repercussions for the organisation of the Centre. The instigation of worker's meetings (page 246) was an attempt to cut across these differences by giving primacy to the group of women who spent most time in the Centre. These meetings were consciously different from the collective meetings, being held during the day, and set up with the intention of creating a cohesive group who would be informed about and involved in the day-to-day activities. If this could be achieved it would also have the effect of reducing some of the pressures on the paid workers (which

will be examined in Section Three). However, at this time the protracted difficulties with the premises were still paramount and the worker's meetings ceased after a while.

2. Continuing Difficulties

The building into which the Centre was to move had been left in a very dirty and dilapidated condition by the previous tenant. There was a good deal of enthusiasm for cleaning and redecorating but it was soon discovered that far more substantial repairs were needed and that there would be a considerable (and unanticipated) delay before the building was ready to be used. The lease could not be signed until work identified by the surveyor, including treatment of the flooded cellar and rewiring, had been carried out. It was necessary to postpone the opening party planned for March, 'for a few weeks'. The party eventually took place in November.

This period, during March and April 1982, was characterised by well attended and enthusiastic meetings where significant numbers of women showed their willingness to work towards making the Centre a viable enterprise, and continual difficulties and uncertainties about the premises, to the extent that there was still discussion and investigation of other locations. Apart from the poor state of the building the greatest difficulty arose because the Council, unlike the Cadbury Trust, refused to deal with the Women's Centre as an organisation. They would not accept a corporate signature to the lease, but instead were attempting to insist that two individuals signed and thereby accepted personal liability for keeping the premises 'in good repair'. The Council had obviously not sought to enforce this clause with the previous tenant, a second-hand dealer, but the feeling was that the antagonism which still existed towards the Centre in some quarters might make it more likely that they would take action in the

future. A solution proposed by the collective was that a much longer list of women - up to 15 - would sign the lease and thus spread the liability more widely. Eventually a compromise solution was reached whereby the Council agreed to accept six signatories and another, informal, list was drawn up within the Centre of women who were prepared to share the liability if the need arose.

It was also at this stage that Linda was beginning to feel that her job was not turning out to be the one she had been appointed to do - and wanted to do. The state of crisis had been going on for so long that it had become normal in terms of everyday work, and while it was important to define it as temporary in order to look forward to a more stable and rewarding future, the actuality was that so much time was taken up with administration and fund-raising there was very little left for anything else. Linda felt that in the present situation the job was too big for one person and found it hard to understand why the Centre had not applied for two CEP workers. This view seemed incontestable now, but at the time the application was made it had appeared as though one full-time worker would be so much of an addition to the work-force as to be sufficient to solve the problems as they were then identified. What had not been clearly seen was the extent to which the 'crisis' would persist in some form, and that consequently there would be a continual need to include negotiating with the Council and other outside bodies as part of the job description.

An example of this kind of difficulty occurred towards the end of May. The Centre was still using an office in the Annexe as it had now been found that the floorboards in the new premises were rotten, and the solicitor was pressing the former tenant for either a reduction in the cost of the lease or for the work to be carried out at his expense. This meant that it was impossible to avoid interacting with the School although there was antipathy towards any prolongation of the

relationship on both sides. One night the Centre was broken into and an electric typewriter and the petty cash box stolen. The reaction of the School, conveyed via the administrator, was, 'You're not covered by the insurance, you're not really here.' The direct dialling facility had also recently been disconnected, but without any advance warning. 'You come in on Monday morning and find there's no phone - they don't tell us anything.' On the other hand the school was continuing to administer the wages, although those who had to go to the office to collect them described the atmosphere as 'icy'. Only one of the receptionists would put incoming calls through; the others would say that they couldn't or that there was no one in the Centre.

3. The Problems of Being a Worker

Both Linda and Jo talked to me about the difficulties they experienced in doing their jobs, and how they found that what they actually did differed from what they had expected and how they would have wished to spend their time. Jo said:

> I find it very difficult really working there. You're pulled in lots of different directions, plus a responsibility to someone who comes in and says, 'I'd like to work here unpaid. What shall I do?' That, plus being part-time, two days a week. I sometimes long for just one task, one direction. It's problematic on lots of levels really. The pragmatic one of just getting what needs to be done, done. I'll get the accounts out one morning and half an hour later a woman comes in - even if I'm point blank rude to her she will still talk to me about whatever she's talking about, or I might decide I want to listen to her anyway and they don't get done that day, and why should I take them home to do when I get £39 a week to be there? So it doesn't get done for weeks and weeks. I could hand it to someone else but no one else has amassed the knowledge that I have to do those bloody accounts. Practical problems are even things like the Centre is for women to meet each other, I think, but with some women there's just silence and they don't talk to each other and then I feel this awful responsibility to be this catalyst or this caring person.

Linda arrived at a similar view-point after some months of working in the Centre.

> I had hundreds of plans when I first started the job that I would get out and about different places. I suppose in a way it's the tyranny of the telephone, and also if the Centre says it's open then I think it has to be open because otherwise women are going to come down and find it closed and not come again. I suppose what I didn't comprehend when I first came to the interview was what being the only full-time worker in a place is; that's been the biggest thing for me . . . and perhaps being on my own for long stretches of time, and if women did come in they were women I had to support rather than it being a two-way thing . . . I would now never take a job where I was the only full-time worker, because it does feel that a lot of responsibility falls on me. That's not to say it's not wonderful when Jo's there, but she's not there all the time and her place isn't filled by other people. That had not occurred to me.

She had discovered that although, strictly speaking, there was nothing to prevent her going out to visit other groups with the intention of creating more interest in the Centre, the women who did come in regularly were reluctant to be left on their own to deal with callers and to answer the phone, and were also very dependent on her for direction. Thus a situation developed where those women who were interested and capable of discussing policy and initiating activities actually spent a very limited amount of time in the Centre, while those who were frequently there needed support from the paid workers and tended to behave in a way which assumed a hierarchical structure. In this context Linda described how the position of Iris had changed due to changed circumstances.

> Since we've lost the typewriter we've actually lost what Iris saw as her main skill in the Centre and it's quite seriously devalued her, in her own terms and possibly in other people's as well. But we don't do any typing anymore. She can do lots of things, but she somehow assumes that because there's this group of us who've got degrees we should be deferred to. It's really difficult to overcome - I think that's our problem to take on, not hers, perhaps. (But) I'm not prepared to answer questions like 'Linda, what shall I do?' I mean not for ever.

I asked Jo how she responded to women who came in willing to help, but without any previous experience of working in a collective organisation.

> I find that very difficult, and I think Linda is quite good at that, 'cos I get so exasperated when they say, 'Tell me what to do.' I suppose partly because (and this is the bit I don't like), I'm thinking 'If I ask them to do that will they do it right?' But then it's also exasperating if I say, 'Would you like to do this?' then I have to spend time showing them and the afternoon's gone. Perhaps that's my job, but then we need more people to do it.

Both Jo and Linda wanted to work in a way which would emphasise and enhance the collective aspects of the Centre, but found that doing so was time-consuming to the extent that at some point a decision had to be made about 'getting on' with other things or continuing to pursue their support roles. They were continually torn between development work outside the Centre, the essential administrative tasks, and initiating and training other women who would in the future be able to take on some of these tasks. The worker's meetings were one way in which they attempted to broaden their support base, but at this time the continuing 'temporary' existence in the Annexe made it difficult to establish this group.

4. <u>What is a Collective?</u>

A meeting in late May tried to assess the shortcomings of the present situation and to suggest what positive steps should be taken as soon as it was possible to move into the new premises. Much of the discussion focussed on what might be described as the 'atmosphere' of the Centre. In spite of the difficulties and unofficial nature of the present situation some people were still finding their way in, but concern was expressed that the image the Centre had in the community was as a place for people with problems. Linda said she felt this had a lot to do with the physical setting; it was hard for women to come in without a specific problem, and on her part, hard to know whether she was striking the right balance between being welcoming and overwhelming. It was difficult to put ourselves in the position of

newcomers, but everyone knew that spending very much time in the present building was not particularly pleasant. The vision of the new Centre which was collectively constructed was of a much more open, welcoming environment which would make it easy for women to spend time there, and which would emphasise 'fun' activities as much as problem-centred ones. The other important dimension of this vision of the future was that the Centre should be busy, used by a wide range of individuals and groups and as a focal point for information and contacts. Also, as Linda saw it, the role of the paid workers would be different. 'The paid workers shouldn't be running the Centre, they should be there to facilitate other women to run the Centre.'

This picture was very much in contrast with the present, rather reduced group of women. None of the workers were coming to collective meetings and the workers' meetings had by now ceased. Two of the regular attenders at collective meetings said that they had begun to ask themselves why they were there and 'making decisions' since they weren't actually doing anything in the Centre. However, both Jo and Linda said that they welcomed the support and the chance to discuss issues with women who shared their feminist assumptions. In parallel to the way they sought assistance from the group of workers for tasks such as book-keeping and filing, they valued a reference group which allowed them to examine the ideological questions which arose in the course of the work. Nevertheless, the basic unease that two such distinct groups existed, remained a matter for concern. Jo described the situation in this way:

> (There is a) very big difference between a Women's Centre which has grown out of a local community and a collective which has grown out of committed feminist women. What we have is a pool of some committed women who are mostly in paid employment plus other women - who are what the Women's Centre is about - and come in for a multitude of reasons, and you cannot assume a baseline ideology.

During the summer these discussions continued, but the on-going crisis over the premises at last came to an end. The lease was finally signed in July 1982, which meant that it was possible to move into the new building and begin cleaning up and decorating. This, at least, was something which could be enjoyably shared, but when the first meeting took place in the Albert Street building it was clear, from the point of view of the paid workers, that this sharing was not extensive enough. Both Jo and Linda said they were finding meetings in general depressing, and that they were just reporting back decisions which had been made anyway. As such, they found them largely a waste of time and they suggested that they could be improved by restructuring along more conventional lines with a formal agenda, minutes and so on. For some people, including myself, the advantage of this kind of change was not so obvious; there were expressions of how nice it was to have these meetings as a focus for seeing other people and keeping in touch - if there were any contentious issues it was assumed that they would be talked through with the collective before any decision was made. With the advantage of hindsight I now consider that many members of the collective failed to recognise just how clearly they were being told that that kind of general support was not really very useful at the present time, and that 'decision making' was not normally something which could be deferred, if required. It happened all the time, and if you weren't there you weren't part of it. As a strategy for the future it was decided once again (see page 246) to alternate business meetings and issue-based discussions, and, in an attempt to increase the number of women who had a more intimate knowledge of the Centre's workings, to have a rotating chairperson who would be responsible for producing the agenda.

When I talked to Jo and Linda later about these issues they made it clear that they valued the collective and wanted it to continue,

'because it was the body we could come to.' On the other hand it was not sufficient for the collective to be simply a source of ideas or a means of keeping alive a vision of a better future. For it to work well for them it would also have to be a source of energy which they could bring to bear on the day-to-day work. For Jo, the commitment to producing a non-hierarchical form of organisation was, in itself, a considerable drain on the available energy.

> With no models, it's a continual struggle to work out what a collective is . . . The point about being pulled in six different directions is true. I thought at the beginning that's how we must operate and I thought perhaps collective working was partly about that, but now I think I would be more into being very specific about other people's responsibilities because - well I just don't think you can run anything on this basis.

Karen pointed out how, from her perspective, the style of the collective had changed from the heady days of the campaign.

> Collective action before had been very much, 'We need to act, we need to work out plans of action, to work out how we can achieve the goals we set ourselves', and that I found fine, really energising. Then I had a lot of problems and I can remember bringing them up along the lines of that I felt uneasy actually being directive and suggesting things, but why I felt I had to was that what seemed to be coming out was a sense of . . . you know, meetings wouldn't really start, they would drag on. There was no sense of, 'This has got to be done, we're going to do it.' As long as we were doing things collectively the question of whether we were doing them effectively using all the resources we had didn't seem to be there.

Another incident highlighted the lack of clarity surrounding the status and functions of the collective. Two women, attending for the first time, had dominated the meeting in an aggressive and over-bearing manner. This led to an examination of a question which had so far been given little attention - just how open were these meetings? In the past newcomers had always been welcomed, but this had carried with it the assumption that being <u>interested</u> also implied <u>doing</u> something. And simply coming to meetings and expounding one's opinion was not seen as 'doing something'. There was an emerging feeling that participation

in collective meetings needed to be legitimated by active involvement.

The Centre was now ready for an 'official' re-opening, and a week of events culminating in a day workshop and the long-postponed party was arranged for the end of November. The workshop, which was attended by about thirty women, was intended to publicise the existence of the new Centre and to explore its future direction and activities in terms of the needs and interests of women in the community. However, this aspect of it was over-laid by disagreements between sub-groups within the collective about the nature of appropriate involvement and commitment. These disagreements were essentially the same ones as had been explored in collective meetings in recent months, but the added sense of occasion served to heighten and intensify feelings. It is important to state here that I was clearly identified with one of the sub-groups, that my observations are therefore made from a particular perspective, and that I can, at best, do only partial justice to the views of some of the other women whose perspective was different.

The group with which I was associated consisted mainly of women who had been involved in some capacity for a long time and belonged to the collective, but whose other activities did not allow them to spend more than a small proportion of the working week actually in the Centre. The involvement of this group can be typified as more historical and contingent than that of the paid workers and those who spent more daytime hours in the Centre. This second group had recently been joined by a number of unemployed graduates which had the effect of raising its level of articulateness. (I want to point out here that while I am focussing on the confrontational and climactic aspects of the workshop, some participants were able to have a pleasant day which was not intruded upon by these disagreements.)

The morning session took place as planned, but in the afternoon a 'coup' took place. The sessions which had been planned were replaced

without consultation by a more general discussion of 'who would do what' in the new Centre. The first group expressed amazement and indignation that their prepared contributions to the workshop were apparently and inexplicably not wanted. Meeting afterwards, they felt the need to unravel their personal feelings of slight from a serious examination of whether their withdrawal from the Centre as individuals might, in the long term, be better for the Centre. Hence much of the discussion focussed on trying to understand the values being articulated by the second group. For example, the visibility and viability of different kinds of work in the Centre appeared to be of crucial importance. Interestingly, Jo, who was associated with the first group historically, had not shared the discomfort of the others - her first reaction to the workshop being that, 'It had gone quite well, really.' Her main contribution had been to read out a long list of administrative and clerical tasks 'which had to be done before anything else could happen', and it was this emphasis, together with the assertion that decision making should rest with those who were most frequently there which called into question the viability of the kinds of inputs which were made by the first group. On examination they realised that their inputs, typically, were made at times of low visibility, such as Saturday mornings, or involved the kind of work which, superficially, seemed to imply the kind of professional/client relationships which had been rejected in the past.

This group also felt it necessary to consider whether their behaviour did constitute a concentration of power which should therefore rightly be rejected. The general feeling was that it was not possible to answer this question definitively. Perceptions of power concentration must depend on one's perspective, and at this point both 'sides' could be said to be accusing the other of power-grabbing. However, in one matter at least it was felt that there could be no

argument about the realities of commitment; this was the lease - and it had not been mentioned at any time during the workshop. While the women concerned did not want to feel that the fact of having signed the lease conferred any additional rights to them, nevertheless the act of signing had been an important one, both symbolically and in terms of any real financial liability it might bring. It was therefore particularly upsetting to realise how little meaning it carried for some of the other women. (The view was later expressed to me that failure to mention the lease during the workshop had not been wilful avoidence; rather it had been seen as a simple 'administrative detail', lacking the symbolic value accorded it by the first group.) The discussion ended with a sense that each woman needed to work out her response to the events for herself but that, importantly, she did have a choice about whether to re-enter the fray or to withdraw at that point. For myself, I felt it was not inappropriate to withdraw at that point. It was true that my involvement had become more marginal recently, and I decided I needed to recognise the extent to which I was prioritising other commitments and that, for the foreseeable future, I was not prepared to devote any more time to the Centre.

However, perhaps not wishing to leave the situation in such an unresolved state, I decided to attend one more collective meeting. This decision, although arbitrary, was important in that it left me with a far more optimistic view of future possibilities than I would otherwise have had. Although initially awkward, this meeting did develop into a forum where an open exchange of views was possible. The fact that the new members of the second group knew nothing about the lease was rectified, and the seemingly narrow focus on administrative and clerical work within the Centre was restated as an attempt to remove it from the 'totally invisible' area. Arguments were put forward as to whether it was more appropriate to organise the

Centre around a closed or an open collective, communality of experience and the safety of familiar faces being ranged against the impossibility of unequivocably defining 'work' and distinguishing between workers and non-workers. As the discussion proceeded it became possible to examine more calmly the issues raised by the workshop and eventually the woman who had been most strongly advocating a closed group remarked, 'I seem to be outvoted'. However, in conclusion, it cannot be said that one side or another 'won', but that the principle of dialogue had been reinstated and with it the possibility of a dissolution, rather than a transference, of power.

Postscript

In February 1983 Linda's funding came to an end and Jo resigned as well, feeling that being the only paid worker was an untenable position. During the summer the Centre was kept open by a small group of women who made application to the Manpower Services Commission for funding under the Voluntary Projects Programme. This funding was granted and in October 1983 five paid workers were appointed to the Centre.

V. SUMMARY

1. Organisational Movement

The case of Greystone shows greater complexity than that of Whitefield. In terms of organisational movement the distance covered is greater; from a more completely enacted community work model to a fully realised autonomous Women's Centre. In addition there is greater heterogeneity among the actors and fuller interactions with other agencies and with the environment.

The first and third phases of this case study show some similarities with the situation at Arlington (page 105) where the

existence of a physical location for the Centre could be assumed, but where there was also a degree of variation in the composition of the group and in the definition of the task. In the second phase, during which the Centre is without secure premises for several months, the task of the group assumes a simple clarity - to establish an independent Women's Centre - and to this end the level of organising activity is at its highest. The second phase also marks a change in the criteria for membership of the group. The 'managed' mixture of local and non-local women advocated in the early stages (page 199) gives way to a more open policy to all interested individuals (pages 232-233). In the third phase where maintenance activities assume greater prominence the criteria for membership of the group are again modified to emphasise activity rather than interest (page 258).

To an extent, each phase in Greystone's history may be viewed as defined by the presence of a dominant individual; in turn Ann, Jo and Linda. This observation obviously illustrates the greater power and influence which is available to those who spend more time within the organisation (see, for example, Col (1981)) and the probability that these individuals will be identical with those who are paid for their time, but it also makes the point that the structuring of the organisation is, in part, determined by the values and attitudes of the dominant individuals. This approach has some similarities with Berg's (1979:256) work on organisational change, where he discusses organisational processes in terms of emotional structures or 'gestalts'. The emphasis he places on collective phenomena is accepted, but in this case it appears more appropriate to attribute differences in organisational structuring and climate (and their associated 'visions') to the different values and ideologies held by the dominant participants (cf. Pettigrew, 1979:576,577). The three phases may be briefly characterised as follows. Throughout most of the first phase

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Ann's strong commitment to a community work approach (page 194) and her important 'gatekeeping' function in relation to the resources provided by the school (page 211) were influential in defining the kinds of activities which the Centre could undertake, the mix of participants, and the form of decision-making structures. A statement on the need for an 'open' decision-making structure was made at one of the first meetings (page 202), but Ann's position enabled her to resist this demand until the time when she decided to resign (pages 226 - 227). After her departure Jo's refusal to place herself in a similar central position (page 233) was important in the subsequent emergence of the collective. Jo was still being paid during this period of uncertainty and thus carried out much of the work, but the fact that this work was done with the backing of a collective and in the light of collective decisions was important to her. Thus both the emotional and practical support she received from the collective and the fact that the Centre was organised in a way which was congruent with her own values were important in enabling her to persevere through difficult circumstances (pages 236, 243).

When Linda was appointed she had already acquired some experience of working within the women's movement. This meant she was able to bring to her work in the Centre a more consciously feminist orientation than had prevailed in the past. One effect of this was, by the changing of names and the abolition of personal files (page 248) to remove the remnants of the community work model which still existed. As time went on, the fact of the collective's existence was no longer sufficient to justify its existence, as it had been in the second phase. Linda's view of the role of the paid workers (page 256) and her efforts to establish workers' meetings (pages 246, 250) placed more emphasis on those who participated over those who were merely interested. While both Jo and Linda continued to acknowledge the

value of the collective in terms of the general support it provided for their work, the increasing distinction between the collective and the workers' group served to reduce, both on pragmatic and on ideological grounds, the legitimacy of the collective as a decision-making body (page 257). The final workshop (pages 259-261) provides a clear expression of these differences.

Under (2) we will look more closely at the values which are expressed via the organisational structuring of the Centre, and in particular at the tactics used to manipulate this structuring in the direction of preferred modes of conduct and end states. Finally, under (3) the Centre's relationships with the environment will be examined.

2. Values: Their Espousal and Enactment

During the first phase at Greystone the general orientation was very different from the situation at Whitefield where the notion of 'an alternative social services' (page 180) was rejected. On the contrary, the early publicity material (page 192) and the training courses (page 193) enshrined a problem-centred approach and a quasi-professional response from the volunteers. This approach was further reinforced by the expectations of 'clients' (page 198) who, commonly, were already experienced in dealing with helping agencies. The major difference, however, between the social services model and the community work model rested on the longer term intentions. The vision presented of the eventual end state was of a situation in which the professional input would become redundant, and the Centre would be run by women who would be able to relate to problems on the basis of similar life experiences (page 194). The crucial problem facing the Centre throughout this period when the needs of 'local' women were seen as primary was to find a way of moving from a position where 'outsiders'

were used for their skills, but discouraged from 'taking over' (page 199). Ann's response was to spend much of her time encouraging and supporting 'local' women (page 199), but as Jo pointed out (page 199) the nature of the work, and thus the skills required to perform it, placed heavy demands on some women.

An early meeting (page 202) proposed that some format for decision making which would facilitate a reduction in the distinctions between different groups of women be adopted. This, it was intended, would ease communication and skill sharing and also increase the level of involvement of members. However, such a body was not constituted until some time later with the formation of the collective (page 231). The Management Committee which was formed in its place (page 203) included a number of representatives of outside agencies, and, as Jo observed (page 205), could not operate as a vehicle for developing a self-help form of organisation. Nevertheless, the criterion which Ann intended would signal the moment for her withdrawal was that of a strong and cohesive 'core' group of participants (page 206). The Management Committee did not appear to be moving in this direction; indeed attendance was falling and meetings were moved from evenings to lunchtime in an attempt to counter this (page 209). A short-lived attempt to set up a smaller group (pages 209-210) also failed, and the impasse remained until the series of ad hoc meetings (pages 222-223) decided that the present situation was untenable. Although Ann still felt the Centre was not in a position to permit her withdrawal (page 221) the pressure to organise on a collective basis (intensified by events in the environment) led to her decision to resign (pages 226,232).

The collective was formed (page 232) by the simple process of inviting as many women as possible to attend a meeting to discuss the future of the Centre. At this stage the perceived need was for a broad base of interest in the community as a counter to the relatively

isolationist position in the first phase. It is probable that, to some extent, the current crisis facilitated the formation of the collective as a 'cause' around which to organise, but the view that a collectivity of interest already existed which had been effectively suppressed by the previous structuring of the Centre (page 237) must also be considered. Both Karen and Jo instanced the importance of the support of the collective in undertaking difficult tasks (pages 238, 243). By the time of Linda's appointment (page 242) the importance attached to collective working was such that evidence of her commitment to this was the prime consideration in the decision to offer her the post.

The January workshop (pages 243 -245) illustrates the importance placed on open decision making. In terms of reflexivity and responsiveness to the wishes of participants the approach is very similar to the one adopted at Whitefield (page 140). Equally, the 'competing claims' made on such an organisation and its members are identified, and here they are examined in some detail. Notably, the dilemma raised by the wish to operate in a non-hierarchical way and the different modes of participation inherent in the nature of a Women's Centre remains unresolved. On the other hand the view that the Centre should aim to attract a particular group of women, as in the past, is challenged, and instead the stress is placed on accepting whatever 'interest' is shown and working with this to create a setting which will, in turn, prove attractive to those outside.

The different forms of participation in the Centre identified at the workshop were later enacted in a range of meetings at different times and with different agendas (page 246). The aim was to increase the level of participation by making it possible for the maximum number of women to become involved in some way. However, this modification did not remove the need to find some way of identifying and operationalising the distinction between 'policy' and 'day-to-day'

decisions. The issue of the case records (page 248) is an example here.

It was becoming clear that the 'interest' which had been welcomed during the second phase no longer provided a strong enough support for the work of the Centre. In part this was due to the persistence of the 'crisis' (page 252) which increased the scope of the work, but even under more normal circumstances Jo and Linda had difficulty accomodating the demands placed on them within the available time (pages 253-254). The view that the paid workers should act essentially as facilitators (page 256) was hard to enact when the majority of the women who were able to spend time in the Centre lacked experience of collective working (page 255), and in many ways the earlier distinction between 'locals' and 'outsiders' is identifiable with the later differences between feminists (those who identified with the ideology of the Centre) and non-feminists (pages 250, 256). One effect of the distance of most collective members from the work of the Centre was to produce a form of meeting which consisted largely of reporting back on decisions which had already been made (page 257) and which were similar in style to the meetings of the Management Committee (pages 209-210). From the workers' point of view this was unsatisfactory and various attempts were made to broaden their <u>active</u> (as opposed to ideological) support base, through the instigation of workers' meetings (pages 246, 250) and a rotating chairperson (page 257).

The vision of the new Centre (pages 244-255, 250, 256) which had served as a motivating force throughout the period of transition was now losing its power. In the sense that funding and premises had been acquired, the future had arrived and with it a decreased sense of purposiveness (page 258). The need to consolidate this new position led Jo to question the viability of continually having to negotiate a path through a totally open decision making structure (page 258)

and the domination of a meeting by two 'outsiders' (page 258) further reinforced this view. The November workshop (pages 259-261) effectively focussed the tensions of the third phase, and was able to do so because finally a 'within Centre' group closely approximating to the intention behind the workers' meetings had been established. Although a temporary victory was won by the group advocating a 'closed' organisation for the Centre, the final meeting reasserted the principle of 'open' organisation.

3. Relationships with the Environment

The Women's Centre in Greystone had at all times a more public face than was the case at Whitefield. The initial opening was accompanied by wide publicity throughout the locality, and was followed up by talks and 'encouragement' (page 199) to selected individuals. However, the identification of the appropriate constituency to which to direct attention was informed by the prevailing value system, and thus the constituency addressed in the first phase is not identical with that addressed in the third phase. The second 'campaigning' phase is characterised by wider interaction with the environment than the other two phases.

The description of the attendance at the opening day (page 195) makes quite explicit reference to the fact that the Centre is located in a community work network. Such a group would have been unacceptable later when a more feminist ethos prevailed, and invitation to the workshops (pages 244, 259) was limited to women. A difference also arises in the fact that the workshop participants were invited to influence and to contribute to the work of the Centre, whereas the intention behind the opening day was primarily one of increasing awareness of the existence of the Centre. In terms of continuing relations the agencies invited to send a representative to

the Management Committee were those who were seen to 'be the most help to the Centre', (page 203): Simpson School, Social Services, the Community Relations Council and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, among others. Not all these workers developed strong associations with the Centre through the mechanism of the Management Committee (page 205), and the extent to which the additional facility offered by the Centre was used was limited. The social services department referred some clients and in the areas of health, mental health and probation after-care (pages 215, 218) new initiatives were established. In areas where there was already adequate provision, as was the case for Asian women (page 215) and welfare rights advice (pages 193, 198), the intended developments did not take place.

In general, where agencies percieved that their area of competence was encroached on by the Centre's work (page 217), greater difficulties were experienced in developing a working relationship, and in some cases, notably that of the Benefits Centre, the objection to the Centre was more fundamental. Throughout this period the close association with the School was a constraint on the activities of the Centre (pages 211-212). In essence, it was necessary to comply with a definition of 'non-political' activity which was acceptable to them, and this definition was not acceptable to the Benefits Centre (page 211) nor, later, to some of the workers in the Centre (pp 220/1). The full effects of these different definitions were not appreciated until some time later, when the second attempt to acquire major funding for the Centre was made (page 228). It only then became clear that the lack of endorsement from the Benefits Centre influenced the course of the first application (pages 207, 211). However, acquiring such information was not part of the remit of the Management Committee, and any such attempt would probably have been seen as unacceptable in itself. The quotation on pages 211-212 makes clear the extent to which

negotiations with the School were narrowly channeled, and the limitations placed on the Centre as a consequence. The main reason for cooperation with the School - free premises - ended abruptly when the School was placed under pressure by the council (pages 225-226), and there was no question at this point that the School would support the Centre in the face of this opposition.

When, in the wake of the closure, other agencies were canvassed it became clear that the lack of support was more extensive than had previously been appreciated (page 226). The criticisms were directed both at the overly-independent stance of the Centre and the form of its organisation. The success in obtaining funding from the Cadbury trust appears attributable to the extent to which these criticisms were answered (pages 228-229). In order to achieve this it was necessary for members of the group to acquire information which they had not previously sought and to exercise skills which had not previously been required. The incident on pages 229-230 illustrates the extent to which these skills were lacking and also points up the new importance placed on collective processes within the group. However, in spite of these shortcomings, the group was successful in 'constructing' an issue which provoked a reaction from the council (page 236), although ultimately no help was provided from this quarter beyond the granting of change of use on the new premises (page 243).

In all the discussions of alternatives which took place at this time the extent to which the Centre might be shaped or influenced by one association or another was important (pages 234, 239). The reluctance to accept constraints on the work of the Centre was reflected in the amount of time and energy expended in the search for independent premises. The building which was eventually found was in a poor condition but this was insufficient to detract from its other advantages. Primary among these advantages was the facility for

self-determination; the January workshop instances the replacement of the unacceptable influence of the School on the work of the Centre, with the legitimate influence of other women.

Due to the extensive repairs required in the new building the Centre continued to use an office in the School's annexe for much longer than either side had anticipated or would have wished. However, no move was made to evict the Centre although working conditions became increasingly difficult (page 253), and the proximity of the School became more of an irritant than the powerful constraint it had been in the past.

For the remainder of the field work the important discussions were those which have already been outlined under (2); namely the negotiation of a relationship with the community of women who might engage with the Centre in a way which was both pragmatically and ideologically acceptable. The dimensions of these negotiations have already been indicated (page 268). Moving from the turbulence of phase two to the relative stability of phase three meant that there were fewer forced interactions with the environment and, concomitantly, more attention was given to the internal processes of the Centre.

CHAPTER 8

Discussion

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

> 'I have the feelings of a woman,' says Bathsheba in Far from the Madding Crowd, 'but I have only the language of men.' From that dilemma arise infinite confusions and complications. Energy has been liberated, but into what forms is it to flow? To try the accepted forms, to discard the unfit, to create others which are more fitting, is a task that must be accomplished before there is freedom or achievement.
>
> Virginia Woolf, 1920.
> Reprinted in Woolf (1979:67)

The emphasis which has been placed throughout this research on the need to approach organisational analysis in a contextualised, processual and historical manner is most obviously summarised by negotiated order theory (Strauss et al. 1963, Day and Day, 1977, Strauss, 1978). However, typically, in the settings (hospitals, medical schools) where this approach to the understanding of social order has been adopted, the situation is seen as one in which different groups of professionals, non-professionals and lay members bring to the same 'locale' different training, socialisation and experience. Faced with a general aim, such as providing patient care, the situation is conceived to have such complexity that it is 'not amenable to solutions by the simple application of the rules of the organisation' (Day and Day, 1977:131). Thus negotiations arise both to cover the different values which different individuals bring to a situation and because of the different contextual contingencies embedded in a situation. It is the second point we wish to emphasise here. Much of the examination of negotiative processes rests on the identification of different (and sometimes competing) perspectives and values (e.g. Bucher and Stelling, 1969), but, as Day and Day (1977:131) observe, 'even in those situations where a remarkable degree of consensus is achieved vis-a-vis such issues as etiology, treatment and organisational policy, the

problem of implementation and the assignment of specific tasks still remains and is subject to the same social processes' (emphasis added). This description closely parallels the situation found in Women's Centres where a high degree of consensus is identifiable around some issues at some times.

In a general sense the arguments of Strauss and his colleagues are a reaction to the inadequacy of bureaucratic rules and procedures to provide sufficient guidance for behaviour in specific instances. In addition they suggest that it is not always possible for individuals to exercise the hierarchical authority which is nominally theirs (Day and Day, 1977:132). The usefulness of this approach to conventional organisations is not disputed, but a caveat must be placed on its immediate applicability to collective organisations. As Rothschild-Whitt (1982:46) has noted, 'bureaucracy and collectivism are orientated to qualitatively different principles'; in the first case individuals are empowered with authority, while in the second authority is granted only to the collective as a whole. In these terms, 'collectivist organisations should be assessed not as failures to achieve bureaucratic standards they do not share, but as efforts to realise wholly different values' (ibid, 1982:47, emphasis added). Thus, it is argued, the themes of negotiated order theory are equally applicable to non-hierarchical and collectivist organisations as to bureaucracies, but the terms of reference must be those which are characteristic of the particular social order under examination. Specific reference points which inform organising activity in the women's movement are values for participation by all, sharing of tasks and skills and rejection of hierarchical forms (see page 67). Strauss et al do not discuss the question of legitimate contributions to negotiated order, assuming perhaps that all participants are individually able to legitimise their conduct by reference to professional codes, structural

positions, etc. In situations where this is not the case, as in collectivist organisations, the intervening concept of legitimacy as the moral authority of consensus is necessary. The 'right' to make influential contributions to social order is, in some part, dependent on those attempts at influence being perceived as consistent with the shared core values of that order, and it is on these terms that negotiation occurs.

Much current organisational research effort is directed towards the explication of change processes; in this case the problem is rather one of creating and maintaining an innovative and unorthodox form of social organisation in contexts where it is rarely fully acceptable and where there are few models from which participants may learn. On pp 86-87 a broad description of Women's Centres was given - attention being drawn to the requirement for a defined physical location, the sense of operating as a 'shopfront' for the women's movement and as a focal point for a network of activities. It must by now be clear that attempts to implement this particular form of social organisation - to establish and maintain a Women's Centre - present organisational participants with a number of difficult, and sometimes apparently intractable, problems to solve. Thus, having interpolated a general definition of a Women's Centre, it must be pointed out that the overarching problem facing participants is the same one - what is the Women's Centre now and how might it be modified to more closely resemble the Women's Centre we would like it to be?

Examination of the antecedent conditions in the case studies shows that the initial impulsion is the creation of something which offers an alternative - a previously non-existent facility and/or a counter to accepted ways of working. This was true both for Jill in Whitefield who rejected what she saw as the patronising style of current community work, and for Ann in Greystone who wanted to work at

something which was less nebulous than the public relations role she saw facing her and who also identified a need for a new facility within the neighbourhood. However, these moves to establish 'something else' did not provide a full definition of what this might be; this was to be worked out in conjunction with other participants. The base-line of the organisation could not be assumed but was to be actively created. Burowoy (1979:6) is one of a number of writers who have argued that, 'organisations do not simply "persist". Like any other enduring patterns of social relations, they have to be continually produced'. His use of the word 'enduring' draws attention to the particularly acute position of Women's Centres whose persistence can only be assumed through the continual production and reproduction of social organisation by its participants. Such small-scale and innovative organisations do not have sufficient momentum or received precedents to 'persist' without continual inputs of time and energy on the part of their members. On the other hand, the lack of inertia and the lack of a 'rule book' makes possible a degree of responsiveness and flexibility which is both desirable - the organisation <u>should</u> be the creation of its members - and useful - adaptation to changing circumstances does not have to overcome the resistance of a very entrenched position. The general point here is that participants, both individually and collectively, may be faced with a wide range of choices concerning how to 'produce and reproduce' the organisation. These choices are made under conditions of limited energy, limited skills and limited resources. While some of the choices made may include seeking to extend the available energy, skills or resources, it is always true that not all possible areas of attention may be dealt with at once. The case studies and the discussion which follows illustrate how priorities are set and choices made, and how other potential 'choice areas' may be relegated to the level of background assumptions.

The following summary points inform the discussion of the case material:

(i) The identification of a shared set of core values which inform both the preferred mode of conduct and the desired end state does not presuppose that the implementation of these values is unproblematic.

(ii) It is not assumed that participants share all values: the potential for some actions and interactions to be 'political' (Pettigrew, 1973) is retained.

(iii) The extent to which values are shared does not affect the probability that inequalities of power and influence persist (Rothschild-Whitt, 1982, Hosking and Morley, 1982).

(iv) All actions, strategies and tactics may be subject to assessments of legitimacy.

(v) The negotiative processes outlined in (i) to (iv) are contextualised by reference to specific situational contingencies which may vary over time. Aspects of the social order which do not enter the arena of negotiation at any period of time may act as 'dominant stabilities' for that period.

The organisational problems facing Women's Centres are, broadly speaking, the same as those facing any other organisation. That is, to find ways of attracting and retaining the involvement of participants, of creating organisational structures and decision making processes, of securing resources and acquiring new ones, of managing its boundary and building relationships, and of choosing its activities.

The remainder of this chapter discusses these issues under six heads. First, under Participation, the value imperatives for open access and participation by all are related to the problems of differential influence and of achieving an acceptable definition of 'all women'. Variations in the commitment level of individual women

are noted and examples given of tactics instituted to counter perceived shortfalls in participation levels. Finally, attention is drawn to the manner in which the legitimacy of the enterprise in this respect is seen to depend on the extent to which the value imperatives noted above can be achieved.

Second, under Power and influence the position of different participants, and particularly the paid workers, is discussed. Various tactics aimed at broadening the knowledge base of the organisation and at devolving power to a greater number of participants are instanced, and it is shown that the extent to which these aims are achieved depends, in part, on the level of maintenance activity required in the organisation.

Third, under Skills and differentials the acquisition of skills, both as an individual and as a collective phenomenon, is shown to be important. The extent to which skilled organisers contribute to the social order of the organisation affects the manner in which the organisation is able to handle the dilemma of 'sufficient' but not 'too much' order. Examples are given which illustrate the probability that there will be a constant requirement to induct 'less skilled' members and that the 'more skilled' are unlikely to maintain a long-term involvement with the organisation, making the management of skill differentials a persistent area of negotiation.

Fourth, under Locating in the environment, the point that the environment cannot be seen as unidimensional (see page 77) is restated. Illustration is provided of how some balance between relationship building with the extra-movement environment and the autonomy which derives from operating wholly within the women's movement, is sought. Changes in this balance occur with respect to different 'stabilities' in organisational configurations at different times, and examples are given of such changes. Finally, it is noted

that the 'openness imperative' requires low boundary maintenance in a within-movement sense at all times.

Fifth, under Receiving and recreating the cultural context, the importance of non-hierarchy under value-rationality is restated, and, following from this, the need for skilled organising (as acts of leadership) to occur in a manner which is consistent with the core values is exampled. The fact that shortages of resources may constrain this process is also noted.

Finally, criteria of Success are constructed in the light of the foregoing. A duality of success in terms of (a) the enactment of the preferred mode of conduct, and (b) movement towards the desired end state is proposed and discussed. More conventional success criteria (reconceptualised as 'degree of establishment') are shown to act, in the manner of dominant stabilities, as means of consuming or releasing organisational energy. The chapter ends with an ideal-typification of the desired end state of a Women's Centre and a summary of the difficulties inherent in achieving this position.

II. PARTICIPATION

Reference has already been made to the fact that Women's Centres offer open access to all women. This is true in the sense that any woman coming to a Centre will receive attention, and is likely to be offered some kind of invitation to become involved with its activities. It has also been noted that 'participation by all' is a component in the set of core values which inform organising activity in the autonomous women's movement. Two problems arise when this formulation is applied to Women's Centres; first, that participation is more than simply access - it depends on being able to and choosing to make influential contributions to social order - and second, that different definitions of 'all' pertain at different times and in different

circumstances. In the case studies there is variation from the closed core group of the self-confessed 'less feminist' Centre at Kington to the complicated system of rotating members of a core group and open policy meetings at Arlington, where the strongly anti-hierarchical approach was intended to prevent a core group forming and hence 'taking over' the Centre.

One statement made about the ideal situation described it as one in which those working in the Centre were also running it. This description was used to refer to the early 'honeymoon' period at Whitefield, and can also be seen as applicable to the period around and immediately after the eviction crisis at Greystone. The importance of this ideal can be seen to impel the short-lived attempt to set up a steering group in the first phase at Greystone, the several attempts to establish a workers' group in the third phase, and to contribute to the rejection of the Management Committee in favour of a more collective form of organisation. Among the examples in the case material NWES came closest to achieving the ideal situation, and we may note here that access was limited to very few newcomers and temporary members, and that the situation there meant that the nature of participation was circumscribed by the requirements of producing a newsletter. In all other cases where there is an intention to combine some of the attributes of a cohesive group, as at Kington, together with an emphasis on accessibility and responsiveness to a wider constituency of women, as at Arlington, competing pulls on the organisational style will have to be managed.

For illustration we may look at the problems which often follow in the wake of attempts to handle the 'openess imperative'. Women come to Women's Centres for a variety of reasons. With some simplification these may be typified as those who come primarily for problem solving, seeing the Centre as one advice agency among others,

and those who already value the idea of women-only space and wish to contribute to it in some way. For many of the first group the notion that they might also become part of running the Centre was a novelty to which they needed introduction. As Ann remarked,

> I spent a lot of time encouraging local mums - talking them into coming to the Centre . . . and doing their morning stint and supporting them through that.

For the second group the idea of a participative and collective structure was a common assumption (see, for example, the minutes of the first meeting at Greystone). The dilemma these two groups present may be compounded when one is perceived to have a greater 'right' to participate, as instanced by Ann's wish to encourage the first group and discourage the second, and is also illustrated at Whitefield by Wendy's failure to join for some time because she had heard 'they didn't want too many middle class women'.

In the first phase at Greystone the Management Committee consisted of a 'representative' number of voluntary workers and a number of women who represented outside bodies. Here the infrequency of meetings and the unfamiliarity of their style for some members did little to further the aim of building a strong group of volunteers. The secondary aim, of building useful relationships with these outside bodies, was also only met to a limited extent. On the other hand, this selection of members left some who were active in the Centre without a means of contributing to its management.

At Whitefield and in the later phases at Greystone when an open participative version of a collective was accepted as desirable, the dilemma between women as users and women as organisers remained and was added to by the discrepancy between women who were prepared to give their support to the ideas and policy making aspects of the Centre by attending meetings but were unable or unwilling to work in the Centre. At Whitefield the same problem is shown by the high attendance at

meetings which were well advertised and defined as important, and the subsequent falling off of attendance in the following months. These variations in levels of participation were a source of concern to those who were more centrally involved and there are a number of references to their felt failure to retain the involvement of others. In individual terms these variations in commitment patterns may be understood, as Gerson (1976) suggests, in part as 'the effect of simultaneous participation in a number of different settings' and in general, 'it is necessary to conceptualise the commitment of a person to a particular situation as the resources and constraints affecting him in that situation as limited by other situations in which he participates'.(ibid, 1976:797, emphasis in original). Thus individuals vary in the degree to which they are mobilizable around a particular issue or may be induced to participate in a given setting. The high attendance which occurs at workshop days or 'important' meetings should not in itself be expected to carry over into more routine aspects of Centre organisation; for this to occur some change in an individual's pattern of commitment organisation is necessary. Given the probable difficulty of affecting more than a few individuals in this way and hence of effecting the participation of all who could or should be involved, some means of dealing with this shortcoming must be found.

After the initial spate of enthusiasm had run its course there was always the sense that the women involved with the Centre, at both Greystone and Whitefield, were smaller in number than was desirable and did not represent the composition of women in the locality, working class and Asian women being under-represented. Neither of these characteristics are quantified, and it is rather the experience of them that should be emphasised since this provides the basis on which action is taken. Acknowledging a consistent failure to involve working class

or Asian women did not necessarily change the ultimate aim - as one worker put it, 'to be all things to all women' - but it did suggest a change in tactics. In another worker's view, 'a Women's Centre can be O.K. just to provide a service for feminist women, and then hopefully the rest will follow'. The importance of sheer numbers, as is evident from the frequent use of the strategy of altering the timing of meetings to enable as many women to attend as possible, meant that those who experienced their routine working situation as isolated and unacknowledged could draw on the support and energy of others. Larger meetings, those in St. John's and the January workshop at Greystone, the launch of the independent Women's Centre project at Whitefield, did not, in the longer term greatly increase levels of participation, but they did give a boost to the smaller groups by endorsement of their activities and proposals. At Greystone the near total distinction between the collective and the workers in the third phase led to a reassessment of the nature of participation. Moral and ideological support was welcomed by the paid workers but it was no longer seen to be a sufficient basis for full participation. Nevertheless, in spite of variations in the basis on which the 'right' to participate is constructed - e.g. class, interest, action or whatever, at different times - there is also a requirement for endorsement, if not participation, by as many women as possible. Looking at these two forms of legitimation separately we can see that the first is politically constructed and contextually understood, and represents a strategy in relation to the second, which derives from a general cultural value for participation by all. The confidence Centre workers have in the legitimacy of their endeavour depends, ultimately, on a larger, and sometimes quite hypothetical, constituency of women.

To summarise: in ideal terms Women's Centres operate in such a way that participants are also organisers, and the women who are

involved in the Centre are representative of the community in which it locates. In practice, women participate in different ways and vary in the extent to which they are 'mobilizable' around any given issue, event or task. In the light of this, two possible organisational outcomes are observable:

(a) defining the nature of legitimate participation so as to exclude some categories of women and/or delegitimate some forms of involvement; and

(b) initiatives are taken aimed at increasing participation levels, both in general, and with respect to certain categories of women in order to increase representativeness.

III. POWER AND INFLUENCE

The previous section has examined the importance placed on equality of participation, the difficulties inherent in enacting this value, and some of the strategic compromises adopted. In this section some of the differences in power and influence which make the pursuit of equality difficult will be examined.

One feature of the case studies presented here is that some actors attain greater visibility than others. This is an effect of attending to the organisational aspects of Women's Centres rather than providing a holistic ethnographic description, since the contributions of some actors to the production of social order - and hence organisation - is more influential than others. This is true for two reasons. First, organising activity requires the exercise of certain skills (Brown and Hosking, 1986) which may not be held by all participants and second, in circumstances of 'fluid participation' (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1983) those who are most often present or who choose to make more commitment to the setting will be more influential. These two factors have obvious applicability to the position of paid

workers who are more wholly 'within' the organisation than most other participants and who therefore have greater access to the knowledge base as well as contributing to the creation of that knowledge. The problem, in terms of the desire for equality of participation, is how to manage this situation and here there were differences in workers' reactions.

Ruth suspected that her arrival at Whitefield in some way contributed to the subsequent decline of the rota system. The discussions which followed about how voluntary workers could (or should) make inputs into the Centre were influenced by the fact that her continual presence meant she dealt with most women who came seeking personal advice. Ruth saw this situation as 'inevitable', leaving the other participants to work out a role for themselves; apart from occasionally playing a deliberately low-key role in meetings she did little to challenge the particular position her post in the Project gave her. On the other hand she offered every encouragement to the group who were working towards an autonomous Women's Centre, while staying outside this group herself.

Ann's approach was different. While she continually advanced the need for a strong core group, this group was not allowed to emerge 'naturally', in any sense, from those who showed the most inclination to work in the Centre, but, in her view, was to be constructed from a particular section of the many potential participants in the Centre. That is, from local women who could relate to each other and to incomers on the basis of 'shared life experiences'. This approach demanded the application of Ann's community work skills to attract and retain the involvement of women who, generally, <u>used</u> the Centre as an advice agency, but who did not participate in its organisation in more than the short term. (The only exceptions to this were the two women who worked as part-time coordinators.) It does not appear that the

Management Committee was ever intended to be identical with the core group who would eventually run the Centre. As constituted its effect on group building processes was more negative than positive, being an unusual situation for local women and an uninvolving one for most of the 'representative' members. While the verbal commitment to the ultimate aim of a participative collective was a continual leitmotif of this phase - usually expressed as 'self-help' - the condition of 'readiness' and its associated devolution of power was never achieved. This fact can be related to the number of issues which were effectively kept off the agenda (Pettigrew, 1972) during the first phase at Greystone. Most participants were not aware of the amount of time Ann devoted to negotiations with the school, and for a long time the appropriateness of this relationship, with its costs and benefits, was not brought on to the agenda. Similarly, the nature and composition of the Management Committee, the applications made to funding bodies, the style of relationships with outside bodies, the choice of services provided by the Centre and the appropriateness of training courses were not discussed openly. The later efforts by a small group of participants to place these items on the table were made possible only after individual decisions to increase commitment levels had been taken, and the group had sought to acquire more information.

For both Jo and Linda part of the reason they had wanted to work in the Centre was because it appeared as a non-traditional setting.

> What appealed to me was that it was this very locally based project.
>
> (I was) really pleased that it was a job within the feminist network.

It was therefore part of their intentions that, while being paid, they wanted to work in a way which broadened the power base in the organisation. Jo made this statement very clearly when she refused to step into Ann's shoes after she resigned, insisting instead that the

newly formed collective was the sovereign body. Linda stated her position as, 'the paid workers shouldn't be running the Centre, they should be there to facilitate other women to run the Centre'. However, in spite of these statements both women influenced the course of Greystone's history; Jo by her refusal to admit defeat during the second phase, and Linda by her insistence on placing on the agenda items which had so far been absent - the exclusion of men and the importance of active (as opposed to interested) involvement.

They both also experienced considerable difficulties in effectively devolving power to the extent they would have wished. The level of support from others was variable - at its highest during the crisis, but for many participants reduced to attendance at meetings after the crisis had passed. Without a sufficient group of women to share the day-to-day tasks the paid workers found themselves assuming almost total responsibility for the necessary administrative tasks, such as bookkeeping, and feeling that they had to provide a support to other women who came to the Centre, as their comments (Chapter 7) vividly show. The greater degree of establishment the Centre achieved increased the level of bureaucracy required to service it. Conversely, the support which could be activated when the existence of the Centre was in doubt did not carry over to periods when this threat had been removed.

To a large extent efforts to share power were reduced to sharing of information. For both the Management Committee and the later collective at Greystone the 'degenerate' form of meeting was one in which reporting back from the paid workers to the other members became almost the sole function of meetings. Jo had a particular distaste for this style of meeting:

> I don't like the reporting back bit; the last few collective meetings have really made me think what collective meetings are for . . . Because we were all members of the collective you didn't know what

> was happening so we had to bring you up to date, and having done that, well, what do we do next?

Her hoped-for solution, that 'users who come to the collective are actually involved day-to-day in the Centre' is one which is expressed frequently; however, a crucial point here is that these additional 'involved' women would contribute to the running of the Centre and to meetings, and would feel some responsibility to contribute. If they failed to do so Jo felt she might be pushed into acting in a way which was counter to the intentions of collectivity.

> The difficulty is that they might not open their mouths . . . and I feel in that dreadful position of pushing people into speaking which is not what a collective is about.

The evidence so far suggests that at Greystone the paid workers were more influential than other participants primarily because they spent more time in the Centre and had acquired more organising skills. This is not to discount the efforts of Jo and Linda to effect changes in the situation, noteably in the amount of work which was given to establishing a workers' group, and finally, the decision Jo made to resign when Linda's funding came to an end, which was dictated by her feeling that the position of one paid worker in a collective was an impossible anomaly. The same formulation might be applied at Whitefield, but in fact is modified by the particular circumstances. The most irksome and least rewarded aspects of Jo and Linda's work - the administration needed to maintain the existence of the Women's Centre - could be assumed or ignored by the women at Whitefield. The location of the Women's Room in an ongoing Project allowed energy levels to ebb and flow without necessarily causing repercussions which threatened its existence. Notwithstanding the polar position of Ruth, the style of meetings was typically very different from those at Greystone. There is little suggestion that items were left off the agenda; grievances were aired and alternative courses of action were

discussed frequently. For example, if and how to operate a rota system, to separate from the Project or to obtain funding and premises. This situation is similar to one dimension of Rothschild-Whitt's (1982) ideal-typification of the collectivist-democratic organisation - 'the consensus of the collective . . . is always fluid and open to negotiation'. Further, the women's Centre steering group, as an offshoot of the women's room at Whitefield, was little affected by the presence of a community worker in the Project. Within this group, while some individuals took a more active part at some times, overall there was no consistent domination by one or a few individuals. From the material presented in the long case studies it is the later stages of this group and the 'crisis collective' at Greystone which came closest to operating as effective participatory groups, in that all members made some influential contribution to the tasks and policies of the group.

To summarise: inequalities of power and influence have already been characterised as 'a persistent problem' (page 70), and the evidence from the case studies reinforces this assessment. Paid workers are often identical with those who spend most time in the organisation, and these women hold (or acquire) greater skills and knowledge than most other participants. The means of redressing this situation makes demands on those who are already occupied in the other organisational tasks, and may create a spiral of disinvolvement on the part of less committed participants. Instances of fully effective participatory groups, where all members make some influential contributions, are limited.

IV. SKILLS AND DIFFERENTIALS

> You've got two tiers whether you like it or not, and the question is what you do with that.[1]

We have already observed that women come to a Women's Centre for a variety of reasons, with different expectations and with different understandings of the situation. However, encouragement to 'become involved', if accepted, implied some form of learning process for all incomers. At Whitefield few formal or overt demands were made on incomers, although it is clear from the case study account that my experience of becoming a member of the group required the move from 'interested observer' to 'active participant', and the concomitant learning of new behaviours. Unfortunately the breakdown of the rota system at Whitefield did not permit me to gain much understanding of its operation, but there is some evidence from Wendy's account of a self-assigned support role, in response to the perception of 'two tiers' of participants.

In the first phase at Greystone the operation of the Centre was formalised to a greater degree, including extensive files of information and of case records of clients. The demands made on potential participants were also greater and the training courses included sessions on complex social security rights and counselling techniques. Later, when the original high levels of expertise expected had been reduced, members were still expected to be able to use the telephone comfortably and generally be able to run an office. These activities were not familiar to some members and a system of 'apprenticeship' was introduced to handle the problem of induction. Clearly there was a strong desire to share skills and to increase the level of expertise

1. All quotations at the beginning of sections are taken from interview transcripts.

of all participants, but as time passed it became questionable whether the most appropriate types of skills were being encouraged. For example, in relation to the social security office, Linda observed,

> I recognise that people like Iris actually have a lot more experience and skills at talking to them. I might get on to them and be frightfully nice and try to reason with them and Iris might get on the phone and say ' * * * '. She's actually more likely to get somewhere than I am!

By the time the personal case records were thrown out the view of women as either clients or advice workers was seriously challenged and the development of group work as a less divisive alternative was fostered. Nevertheless, in most cases the effect of differences between individuals persisted, and both Jo and Linda spoke of the way they felt about continually being asked 'What shall I do?' Although unresolved, there was some suggestion that an approach to this problem should involve those who appeared to hold the appropriate skills as much as those who did not. Referring to one of the 'local women' who did a lot of work in the Centre, Linda said,

> She somehow assumes that because there's this group of us who've got degrees we should be deferred to. It's really difficult to overcome. I think that's our problem to take on, not hers.

So far in this section 'skills' has been taken to mean those which are required to run an office, provide advice and support to others, to set up groups, etc., but it is also necessary to consider the existence and acquisition of the skills of organising (see page 58). These are often described as skills of leadership, but are argued here and elsewhere (Brown and Hosking, 1986) to be necessary components in the process of organising - no matter who does them. In these circumstances we can see that the acquisition and use of the skills of organising may be as much a collective phenomenon as an individual one. Two examples from the case studies provide illustration.

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When the women at Whitefield first conceived the idea of setting

up an independent Women's Centre a long period was devoted to attempts to understand the implications of adopting one legal form or another and to write a 'constitution'. It is highly probable that this exercise was not necessary; what it does illustrate is the desire for action without sufficient information or skills to take action. The repetitive and unenthusiastic meetings were transformed when the urge to act was channeled towards acquiring premises. Campaigning and fundraising could be done, and were done with some success. Another example of the collective acquisition of skills occurred at Greystone when, after the eviction, information was sought and supportive relationships with the environment built where none had existed before. This was a result of a group acquiring sufficient knowledge of the situation and making a sufficient commitment to the future of the Women's Centre to force onto the agenda issues which had so far been absent.

A dilemma facing all social organisations is to build a sense of social order which is 'sufficient' - to provide the basis for action - but not 'too much', which would result in a loss of flexibility and a situation in which the present social order is maintained at all costs. In the latter circumstances cohesion may be achieved, but at the price of a failure to seek resources and a neglect of threats or opportunities. This has relevance for our discussion concerning skills since, as Donati (1983:9) has observed, groups 'which don't have individuals with leadership skills, effectively abandon all but their concern with the "solidary-affective" aspects of their mutual relations'. At Greystone the tension between providing a 'sufficient' basis for action while at the same time attending to the solidary-affective dimensions of participation is a constant theme (see also page 282). A good example of this is the meeting described on page 257 where the paid workers argued that, in their view, restructuring meetings along more

conventional lines would be beneficial, while other members of the collective showed that for them meetings were important for 'seeing other people and keeping in touch'. It is clear that the paid workers experienced this tension almost daily. The need to 'get what needs to be done, done' in addition to contributing to the cohesive dimension of the Centre by being 'this catalyst, this caring person' led one worker to question the viability of the way the Centre was run. 'I think I would be more into being very specific about people's responsibilities . . . it's very difficult working collectively' (see also page 258). For paid workers, the nature of their contractual position allows little escape from the demands of this dilemma. The only possible means of ameliorating their situation is to persuade other participants to become as closely involved and as knowledgeable as they are, but as volunteers. For participants whose involvement with the organisation is voluntary the same restrictions do not apply. They may contribute to and/or consume whatever aspect of the organisation appears most attractive to them and exercise choice about the extent and timing of their involvement. It is not surprising that there are few takers for the more routine administrative and clerical tasks (and the low visibility these enjoyed caused Jo to read out a long list at the November workshop). A common progression for participants is to move <u>through</u> involvement with a Women's Centre to involvement with a group with a more specific identity, e.g. women and health, single parents, etc., as an arena for support, education or campaigning. In terms of the women's movement as a whole, as Ruth remarked, 'there's enough for people to do, and more'. By moving into more specialised groups members may be spared the 'tedium' of continually welcoming in newcomers and are in a position to develop their own interests and to enjoy the benefits of building on a level of shared assumptions without, as the paid workers feel themselves to be, continually having to

provide introductions to feminism to women for whom it may be new.

There is evidence in the case studies that many women's active involvement in a Centre is limited in time. While they are likely to remain supportive of the idea and can be mobilised on that basis, it is unusual for their specific commitment to be attached to a Centre in the long term, either for the reason given above or because of another common transfer of commitment - into paid employment. Except in rare cases, such as Karen who was able to make her work in the Centre part of her job description, it is difficult to combine paid employment with continual involvement in a Women's Centre. It follows that in many cases those women who hold the skills of organising, whether acquired through their experiences in the Centre or from elsewhere, may be mobilised to contribute these skills at times of crisis or to provide support for the idea and for those working to enact it, but the persistence and frequency of their contributions cannot be assumed in a routine manner. The paid workers and the few longer term participants will continually have to manage the induction of new participants while at the same time carrying out the necessary maintenance activities. Differentials are a persistent problem in these circumstances. We may note that, in Chapter 3, it has been possible to instance some tactics for managing or minimising differentials, but that these are drawn from groups which are, generally, 'closed'. (It is usually only groups which have a sufficiently long-term sense of identity who provide accounts of their experiences.) Similar tactics may be employed in 'open' situations, but the cumulative effect of any learning process is likely to be reduced by variation in and the transitory nature of participation.

To summarise: in this section we have examined the need for participants to acquire skills in order to act in and for the organisation. Differentials in initial skill levels and the

appropriateness of particular skills are subject to negotiation, but the over-riding problem is one of an inability to assume that those participants who can contribute their skills to the Centre's organisation will do so in a consistent manner.

V. LOCATING IN THE ENVIRONMENT

A particular feature of social movement organisations or oppositional groups to which attention has already been drawn is that the environment cannot be represented as an undifferentiated whole. Broadly, sections of the environment may be supportive, neutral or antagonistic (page 77), although any particular section of the environment may behave differently at different times. Thus, for example, at Greystone the local social services office and other advice agencies were initially opposed to the Women's Centre; social services changed its opinion when it was made clear that a complementary, not a competing, service was being offered, and other advice agencies gave their support to the second attempt to acquire charitable funding when the Centre had reformed as a collective. Conversely Simpson school was generally, if not wholeheartedly, supportive in the first phase but totally withdrew this support in response to initiatives from the local council. The council, in turn, never accepted the Centre as a body with whom they could form contractual relationships, unlike the funding charities who were prepared to do so.

The range of material provided in the case studies also shows that different organisations exercise a degree of choice in the extent to which they seek out and build extensive relationships with the environment or, alternatively, prefer to emphasise the autonomy of their existence, reducing relationships with the extra-movement environment to a minimum. As before, Kington provides an example of one extreme. Their engagement with national and local politics and

the influence they sought and achieved in this respect may be contrasted with the position of NWES who operated on a mandate from the women's movement and who received their financial and personal support from within the movement.

In the three other cases, Arlington, Greystone and Whitefield, interaction with the environment is essentially intermittent. Here a balance is struck between assembling and maintaining a level of resources - typically adequate premises, and sometimes payment for workers - which are sufficient to fulfil the minimum requirements for a Women's Centre, building sufficiently good relationships with some sections of the environment so that these may provide support if required, or at least will not constitute a threat and, on the other hand, retaining a level of autonomy and self-determination which is commensurate with the rationality of the enterprise. Particularly at Whitefield, the spasmodic nature of environmental interchange is noticeable. In the early stages levels of negotiation with other parts of the Project were high, but after the Women's Room had been set up these were reduced to occasional and intermittent instances. However, its fate remained tied to that of the Project as a whole in that threats to the existence of the Project were also threats to the existence of the Women's Room. In these circumstances the drive for autonomy increased and the search began for ways of negotiating an independent existence. Participants were able to mobilise the latent support for the idea of a Women's Centre by increasing attendance at meetings and by collecting donations and loans towards the purchase of a lease, and also sought to extend their support in the locality by canvassing councillors and talking to the local newspaper.

At other times, exemplified by the middle period at Whitefield, the third phase at Greystone and the period of the urban aid grant at Arlington, relationships with the environment were at a low level.

When the minimum requirements (see above) for the existence of a Women's Centre can be taken for granted, as in these periods, attention is focussed at the level of the group and its internal organisation and is only directed outwards insofar as the number or mix of participants is in some way defined as inadequate, such that modification or enlargement is sought through recruitment. In these terms one other aspect of environmental interchange which is particular to Women's Centres as 'open' rather than 'closed' groups, must be mentioned. The self-imposed imperative to attract women and to be responsive to the needs of many women prevents a sense of complacency developing in periods when everything else is sufficient.

To summarise: as the previous discussion has shown, a Women's Centre depends for the legitimation of its existence on the endorsement of as many women as possible. Therefore the section of the environment which may be seen as consisting of actual or potential participants in the women's movement cannot be neglected. With respect to this group boundary maintenance activity is at a low level and the organisation strives to be as open as possible. With other sections of the environment the situation is different; relationships are sought which are sufficient to provide support if required, but not overly collusive such that freedom to act and develop is restricted by the need to refer to other organisations whose values may be different. Thus, entering into relationships with any section of the extra-movement environment must be appraised in terms of the net gains or losses in the autonomy of the Women's Centre which may ensue.

VI. RECEIVING AND RECREATING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

> It wasn't like an alternative social services. What we were doing, even if you decided it wasn't feminist, was feminist. There was no way you could say being involved with working with women who were beaten up, homeless, who had social security

> difficulties - there was no way you could say dealing with those women wasn't a feminist issue - it was.

In line with the arguments provided about the relationship between structure and process, participants in a women's Centre are seen as being simultaneously in the position of receiving an ideology - from other examples, from their previous experience and from movement literature - and of recreating it through their actions. The instances provided in this research have made clear the importance of shared core values for non-hierarchical forms of organising, skill and task sharing and participation by all. 'The emergence of values that have overriding significance for all members of the field' has been cited by Emery and Trist (1965:28) as a means by which simplification may be introduced into complex situations, such that 'the relevance of large classes of events no longer has to be sought in an intricate mesh of diverging causal strands, but is given directly into the ethical code' (ibid, 1965:28). They continue by noting that this situation 'demand(s) some overall form of organisation that is essentially different from the hierarchically structured forms to which we are accustomed' (ibid, 1965: 28). Thus, it is argued, the sense of social order which is constructed by participants with respect to the value system outlined above is one in which all organisational acts are required to be 'distributed'. That is, any exercise of power, any instance of leadership behaviour, does not, desirably, reside <u>over time</u> with a particular individual or small group. What cannot be argued but must be understood contextually and processually are the specific examples of value enactment. As MacIver (1964:257) reminds us, 'values are values only as calling for attainment or maintenance - there would be no values in a static world; conditions and means are such only as they make for or against the attaining or the maintaining of values'.

As the discussion in Section IV has shown, skilled organisers are essential if the group is not to over-emphasise the solidary-

affective dimension of its existence at the expense of organising activity. Therefore, it is not suggested that leadership acts etc. do not occur; what is necessary is that these are enacted in a manner which is consistent with the shared core values. Instances which are perceived as other than temporally or task specific will provoke a reaction from other participants. However, what are variable and negotiable are the perceptions of temporality or task specificity, and the arena of action between behaviour and its symbolic referents must be understood in terms of the resources participants are able to bring to it (see pages 34, 43). Examples in the case studies illustrate that it is possible for situations which, in the view of some participants, deviate to a considerable degree from the desired end state to persist for some time; the time period involved being that which is required for those who are not able to make influential contributions to the social order to acquire the skills which allow them to do so. Thus we may note the amount of time which elapsed at Greystone before the nature of collectivity, as expressed by the Management Committee, was challenged, and later, when the workers' group was established after a number of false starts, the nature of legitimate influence in collective meetings was also challenged. A similar situation occurred at Whitefield when the perception of a threat to the autonomy of the Centre was not dealt with until the capacities of participants were effectively linked with the demands of the task.

In other situations simpler and more immediate interventions, such as changing the timing of meetings, may be all that is required to redress a perceived imbalance. The general point to be made is that, while there is always some motivation to move closer to the desired end state, some situations may require more resources and more expertise (which will take longer to accumulate) to effect influence. In addition, the negotiative processes through which current situations are

demonstrably linked with the preferred mode of conduct and the desired end state are dependent on participants' ability to make influential contributions to social order. It has been shown in Section IV that the variable and transitory nature of participation in Women's Centres is likely to restrict the extent to which 'experiential resources' (Donati, 1983:3) are accumulated by the organisation as a whole. (This is not the case in 'closed' groups, or for participants who already have experience of organising activity in the women's movement.) The nature of the 'openess imperative' as a characteristic which distinguishes Women's Centres from some other movement groups makes it probable that there will be an ongoing shortage of leadership skills in an acceptable form.

To summarise: in terms of the core values all organisational acts are required to be 'distributed'. For example, accumulated power or entrenched leadership is unacceptable and will provoke a reaction from other participants. However, conditions of 'fluid participation' provide an additional dimension to the negotiative processes through which a sense of social order is constructed. In these circumstances enactment of the core values and movement towards the desired end state may be inhibited or delayed by inadequate accumulations of skills or resources.

VII. SUCCESS

> If we're obsessed with rating our success by the degree that local women use the Centre, then I don't think it's going to be a success for a long, long time. But I think it's a success that it's there.

It has been argued so far that evaluation of the organising activities of groups is to be judged in terms of the relationship between values and (a) modes of conduct and (b) end states. This implies that, for Women's Centres, assessments are made in terms of the

degree to which the skills and tasks of social organisation are accomplished in a manner which is perceived as 'distributed'; that is, the extent to which participants are successful in enacting their egalitarian values. It follows that an important 'output' of social organisation is the very nature and style of the organising activity itself.

Thus, in assessing the success or otherwise of such an organisation, attention must not be directed narrowly to its longevity, its ability to influence the external environment, or its ability to retain members. All these, and other similar factors, must be seen in relation to the need to continually create and recreate a sense of social order in accordance with participants' shared core values. Abrams and McCullough (1976) come to a similar conclusion when discussing the problem of success in communes. In their view it is a matter of 'creating a setting in which multiple values can be at least partially and fleetingly realised' (ibid, 1976:155), and argue that 'a commune is a success insofar as its members seem able to negotiate their way towards a society of equals' (ibid, 1976:161). In these terms success is transitory - the enactment of a mode of conduct which must be continually reiterated - and is also to be understood in relation to the desired end state. This duality of success criteria is expressed in the quotation above, and has been outlined on pages 52-53. Before continuing to discuss this definition of success in more detail it is pertinent to consider the role of success in more conventional terms - the acquisition of premises, resources, etc. It is evident that these aspects can be very important to participants, and at various times considerable energy is expended in pursuit of their achievement. It is, however, this fact which provides the clue to the distinctive meaning of success in terms which define the degree of establishment of Women's Centres. As has been noted on pages 49-50 and

elsewhere, dimensions of the structural configurations which are perceived as insufficient or contrary to the core values will require energy to affect alteration. Conversely, the effect of stability in one dimension will permit energy to be released for attention to other aspects of the social order.

Success as the enactment of a particular mode of conduct may be illustrated by considering the nature of meetings which take place in Women's Centres. Meetings are often seen, both by participants and analysts, as decision making fora. Thus Rothschild-Whitt (1982:27) refers to a 'process in which all members participate in the collective formulation of problems and negotiations of decisions'. That this occurs is not disputed, but we must add two further observations in order to comment on the 'sub-text' of collective meetings. First, it has become something of a truism to assert, as Mansbridge (1973:355) does, that in participatory groups 'decisions take longer to make'. This can be argued to depend on how far the antecedents of a 'decision' are traced back, and how the nature of decision making is understood. Second, Brunsson (1982) has pointed out that decisions are not end products and that the move from decision to action is not straightforward. These observations are borne out by the field work experience. Looking at the collective content and context of decision making <u>processes</u> makes clear the fact that decisions are often made and remade without any necessary connection with action. Meetings are used to maintain a state of 'decision readiness' by reviewing and assessing potential solutions which may be legitimately connected to problems at some future date. They also, quite simply, as women-only spaces, operate as arenas where a mode of conduct which is not widely available may be enacted. Thus success in the shorter term sense - the fact 'that it's there' - refers to the creation and maintenance of an arena in which participants may express their commitment to the

shared core values through the enactment of a preferred mode of conduct.

Success in the longer term sense - the achievement of the desired end state - is unlikely to be attained, as the opening quotation indicates. Nevertheless, the collective construction of the desired end state is important in strengthening motivation and providing direction; a crucial future reference point for present-time assessments. It is possible to outline an ideal-typification of the future Women's Centre from the data presented. Primarily, the requirement is for 'busyness': for the Women's Centre to operate as a node of dense network interaction. The intention is to provide, for all women, information, support and a place to share and develop skills. Density thus provides:

(a) a range of activities, i.e. something for everyone;

(b) cross-cutting relationships, thus reducing the risk of coalescence into splits or cliques;

(c) increased horizontal relationship building, thus broadening the organisation's environmental support base; and

(d) increased legitimacy for the Centre through endorsement by larger numbers of women.

The difficulties encountered in reaching this position have been discussed in this chapter and may be summarised as follows:

(1) If participants are not located in a supportive environmental network they will need to achieve this position.

(2) Differentials occur in the terms on which members enter the organisation. Full participation is defined as holding and exercising the skills of organising, the acquisition of which is more difficult for some participants.

(3) Maintenance of the Women's Centre as a spatially located continuous organisation involves a degree of bureaucratisation. This aspect of the work receives least acknowledgement, and may be

perceived as contrary to the value for open participation.

(4) Experienced members may wish to direct their energies towards single-issue groups which tend to develop separate identities.

To summarise: Women's Centres are successful as organisations to the extent to which participants succeed in creating a social order which enacts their egalitarian values. Instances of success are transitory, and must therefore be approached contextually and processually. In practice, efforts towards successful organisation are constrained by the continual need to assimilate members who may lack appropriate skills or who do not share the values of the social order. More generally, the difficulties are those of innovation - of creating and maintaining a particular cognitive and social order in contexts where it is not fully legitimated and where there are few models on which participants may build.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

In this chapter we will summarise the research and suggest how the understandings which derive from grounded inquiry might be generalised in the construction of an ideal-typification of substantive rationality. We shall also suggest how this research can provide a basis for further investigation, both in terms of redressing its limitations and of exploring new areas of organisation theory.

I. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

In this thesis we have shown by extensive empirical example that the construction and maintenance of non-hierarchical social organisation should not be dismissed as 'spontaneous' or 'natural', but is more accurately seen as occuring through and as an outcome of negotiative processes.

The use of a multilevel research design has enabled us to:

(i) examine the cultural context which informs organising activity in the women's movement, and thus to identify the existence of a set of core values which describe both a preferred mode of conduct and a desired end state of existence;

(ii) observe how the variation in structural configurations and processes both between organisations and over time acts to channel negotiative activity into arenas where meaning is uncertain, where resources are inadequate or where behaviour is inappropriate (Weick, 1979);

(iii) observe longitudinally how participants in Women's Centres -

(a) perceive and respond to problems in the organisation and in relation to the environment,

(b) seek to attract and retain committed participants,

(c) are successful in acquiring resources adequate to their

purpose,

(d) are able to develop organisational procedures which fulfil the value requirement that organisational acts be distributed between participants,

(e) manage inequalities of power and influence, either to reduce such inequalities or to reduce their effects,

(f) handle a continual influx of incomers to the organisation and operate under conditions of fluid participation,

(g) construct definitions of success (as attainment of the desired end state and enactment of the preferred mode of conduct) and reflexively monitor the present position in these terms.

The empirical findings and the theoretical analysis make it possible to comment on:

(i) the nature of attempts to implement non-hierarchical organisation in the particular settings studied;

(ii) non-hierarchical organisation more generally and more theoretically, as an example of substantive rationality (Weber, 1968).

(iii) related issues, which are indicated by this research but not covered by it, and which would provide a direction for future research.

In Chapter 3 the survey of organising activity in the women's movement suggested a number of research questions which were explored in the case studies and discussed in Chapter 8. It has been a central feature of our argument that the core values identified - sharing of tasks and skills, participation by all and the rejection of hierarchical forms - do not determine action (see Brunsson, 1982), but act as 'symbolic referents' (Strauss, 1978). We thus focus on the arena of negotiation between action and its symbolic referents, and

note that the legitimacy of action is understood by participants in terms of its perceived congruence with the core values.

In relation to the organisational processes involved, we have argued for and provided illustration of the role of skills - as skilful information search, interpretation, influence and choice (Brown and Hosking, 1986) - in the construction and maintenance of non-hierarchical organisation. These skills are important for all organising activity; the particular relevance in this context is that the core values which inform organising activity in Women's Centres (and in the women's movement as a whole) contain the requirement that leadership be 'distributed'. That is, that leadership acts which are perceived as other than temporally or task specific by other participants will provoke a reaction. We thus do not argue that non-hierarchy comprises a situation where leadership is redundant (cf. Kerr and Jermier, 1983), and instead describe instances in the case material which show the application of organising skills and the consequences of a shortage of such skills. Theoretically, conceptualising leadership as a set of organising skills leads us to see that leadership may be more or less distributed within a social organisation to an extent which is:

(i) sanctioned by the core values which characterise a particular sense of social order, and

(ii) successfully enacted by skilful participants.

The work of Likert and Likert (1976) has suggested the possibility of an inverse relationship between the degree of hierarchy present in an organisation and the distribution of leadership skills; on the basis of the research evidence we are able to argue that for the successful accomplishment of non-hierarchical organisation participants must devise ways of accumulating and exercising organising skills which are legitimate in terms of their egalitarian values. On this basis we

are further able to suggest that the investigation of forms of task allocation and of collaboration and means of control and integration other than super- and subordination (which Westerlund and Sjöstrand (1979) have identified as underestimated within organisation theory) should involve a recognition that organisation may be successfully accomplished in settings where 'consistent contributions to order are expected and valued from all group members' (Brown and Hosking, 1986).

However, the facts (1) that the relationship between values and action may be unclear, ambiguous or disputed; (2) that the process by which strategies and tactics are legitimately linked to values is 'political' and hence negotiated; (3) that constructing and maintaining non-hierarchical organisation makes demands on participants' organising skills, and that minimising skill differentials makes further demands on participants; and (4) the difficulties of innovating in contexts where the endeavour is rarely legitimated, and is without the benefit of a received body of knowledge and practice; - all these considerations demonstrate that the construction of non-hierarchical forms of organisation is not, and cannot be, a natural or spontaneously occuring outcome of human social activity.

II. NON-HIERARCHICAL ORGANISATION IN WOMEN'S CENTRES

Instances of fully enacted non-hierarchical organisation are rare and limited in time. The case studies have shown that movement towards the desired end state may be delayed or inhibited by such factors as a shortage of resources or information, or a failure to delegitimate the status quo. Particular difficulties arise in the case of Women's Centres:

(i) The requirement for open participation creates circumstances where skill differentials must be continually managed.

(ii) Full legitimacy of the endeavour is defined as endorsement by the whole constituency of women in the locality. This cannot be achieved and therefore failure, in this respect, is persistent.

(iii) Participation is voluntary and intermittent. It cannot therefore be assumed that skilful participants will make consistent contributions. (The nature of individual decisions to participate has been suggested, but not fully explored in this research. See Gerson (1976)).

(iv) A degree of establishment (see page 302) is usually desirable in terms of the requirement for autonomy. However, this is likely to involve some degree of bureaucratisation and, as Rothschild-Whitt (1982:47) has noted, 'wholly different values' are implied by bureaucratic and collective forms of organisation. Where participants in Women's Centres are successful in achieving a degree of establishment they must also manage the associated competing value imperatives.

(v) Similarly, interactions with the environment are likely to involve some engagement with bureaucratic values. Interactions with the extra-movement environment make demands on participants in that they are required to operate in more than one mode; on the other hand a failure to do so may result in a lack of concern for all but the affective aspects of group relationships (see Donati, 1983).

In these circumstances it is not possible to disregard the effects of key individuals. We have noted the influence of the paid workers in the case study discussion, and we suggest that it is probably impossible to effectively remove the differentials created by a mix of paid and voluntary workers. However, we have argued that the basis of the differentials which arise in these circumstances derives more from the additional commitment which is 'bought' than from the fact of wage payments as such. It is open to voluntary participants to match the

commitment level of paid workers, and thus to be as influential in the organisation. In practice few choose to do so for more than a limited period of time.

III. SUBSTANTIVE RATIONALITY

The (generalised) situation in Women's Centres differs from the experience of 'closed' groups (see Chapter 3) in that groups which do not include a value for open participation in their construction of non-hierarchical organisation are able to:

(i) make assumptions about the nature and extent of participation, and

(ii) therefore to work out interpersonal and organisational relationships on a long term basis,

(iii) and thus have only a limited need to assimilate newcomers.

We draw attention to this variation in value requirements and subsequent assumptions since they are pertinent to any attempt to construct an ideal-typification of substantive rationality. Here we refer to Weber's (1968:85-86) depiction of substantive analyses as being such that:

> they do not restrict themselves to note the purely formal and (relatively) unambiguous fact that action is based on 'goal-oriented' methods, but apply certain criteria of ultimate ends, whether they be ethical, political, utilitarian, hedonistic, feudal, egalitarian, or whatever, and measure the results of the economic action, however formally 'rational' in the sense of correct calculation they may be, against the scales of 'value rationality' or 'substantive goal rationality'. (. . .) In addition, and quite independently, it is possible to judge from an ethical, ascetic or aesthetic point of view the spirit of economic activity as well as the instruments of economic activity.
>
> (Original emphases)

In terms of the analysis presented in this research we are able to identify parallels between Weber's 'substantive goal rationality' and desired end states of existence, and between 'the spirit of economic

activity' and preferred modes of conduct. However, while he refers to assessment criteria which are 'independent' we have shown these to be connected by means of a shared set of core values. It seems reasonable to assume that Weber is indicating an analytical distinction here, not that the two reference points are to be understood as intrinsically distinct.

We agree with Rothschild-Whitt (1982:46) that the conceptualisation of an ideal-typification of substantive rationality should represent a polar opposite of formal rationality. For this reason it is necessary to examine carefully any assumptions (implied or acknowledged) contained in any such conceptualisations. 'The limits of organisational reality . . . appear to be far wider than students of organisations have generally imagined' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1982:46), and for this reason care must be taken that theoretical limits are truly approached. (We do not neglect the fact that Weber refers to 'economic activity' rather than 'organisation'; while the latter is generally the reference point adopted by later writers, the former does serve to constrain the range of possibilities examined.) Thus, we cannot accept Satow's (1975) version of value rationality which identifies as characteristic a 'segmented structure' in which segmented groups are retained within a parent organisation 'which is basically bureaucratic' (ibid, 1975:528). In fact, Satow recognises that this form of structuring is strategic, and not polar (1975:531):

> Bureaucracy seems to imply the primacy of adaptation over commitment to goals; the informal ideological group seems to be the opposite extreme. Segmentation is a way of insuring both organisational survival and continued commitment to ideological goals.

In this case we must assume that the accuracy of Rothschild-Whitt's remark (above) is demonstrated by Satow's failure to investigate the 'informal ideological group'.

It will be remembered that Gerlach and Hine (1970) use the

similar term 'segmentary' to characterise the structuring of social movement organisations, but in their case it is made clear that this in no way implies containment within a bureaucratic superstructure. The definition and description of the women's movement (pages 62 - 63) in this thesis closely parallels the network of non-hierarchically organised groups described by Gerlach and Hine, and therefore one form[1] of substantive rationality - that which is based on the espousal of egalitarian values - has been shown to be congruent with non-hierarchical structures. In Rothschild-Whitt's view (1982:23-24) the polar opposite of formal bureaucracy is a fully collectivised democracy. On a number of dimensions her ideal-typification is identical with the generalisations which have been drawn from this study of Women's Centres. Thus (ibid, 1982:37):

> Authority (is) resident in the collective as a whole; delegated, if at all, only temporarily and subject to recall.
> Ideal of community; relations are to be holistic, of value in themselves.
> No hierarchy of position.
> Egalitarian; reward differentials, if any, limited by the collectivity.
> Minimal division of labour. Generalization of jobs and functions. Demystification of expertise.

However, her ideal-typification is firmly located in 'closed' organisations whose participants are all employed by the organisation. On this point we repeat our earlier observation that any ideal-typification must demonstrate its close approximation to the theoretical limits of the organisational form under discussion, and therefore argue that in this respect it is not valid to neglect cases of voluntary organisations whose rationale is not primarily, or possibly even secondarily, economic, but is essentially substantive. This brief discussion of substantive rationality does not aim to present

1. There may be others. Weber suggests a wide range of possible value premises.

a fully worked out ideal-typification - for this further investigation is required. What it does argue is that the formulations examined here have not reached the 'limits of organisational reality', and in particular, that such limits are likely to lie outside the realm of economically-oriented organisations. The limits of substantive rationality are approached by organisations such as the Women's Centres examined in this research, where rationality is characterised by a shared set of core values which describe both the mode of conduct and the desired end state. Whether or not an ideal-typification of substantive rationality should refer to 'open' or 'closed' organisations within this range is, I believe, a matter for discussion.

IV. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The approach to organisational analysis adopted in this research has highlighted the importance of attention to context, process and history (Pettigrew, 1985). However, it has already been noted (page 49) that limitations in the scope of this research have restricted the examination of the processual components of the cultural and environmental contexts. Here we take the opportunity to sketch out some impressions.

Since the research began acceptance of the value of (and hence funding for) women-only organisations has been shown in some parts of Britain, notably in the metropolitan counties. In other areas, lack of acceptance and shortages of funding have placed persistent difficulties in the path of women attempting to set up women-only organisations. There is presently an increasing variation in the distribution of such organisations across the country, which may or may not persist after the abolition of the metropolitan counties. It is also evident that in areas where resources are available, differentiation is occurring between Women's Centres. The oppression

of racism is now better articulated and some Centres are organised by and for black and Asian women. Overall, there are some indications that the difficulties of establishing and maintaining neighbourhood Centres which attempt to involve and cater for all women are better understood, and there is a reduced motivation to set up Centres of this type. These variations have not been explored in this research, and this could usefully be undertaken. So far in this chapter it has also been suggested that further work might usefully explore:

(i) the nature of individual decisions to participate in social movement organisations;

(ii) the relationship between the distribution of organising skills and non-hierarchical structuring;

(iii) the construction of an ideal-typification of substantive rationality.

In addition, it would be interesting and useful to inquire more closely into the nature of consensus decision making and action rationality (cf. Brunsson, 1982).

Finally, it is important that organisational research should not neglect the 'limits of organisational reality' in the development of theory and practice. This exploratory study has provided an indication, through the examination of attempts to implement non-hierarchical organisation within the women's movement, of the issues which are involved and the manner in which such attempts may be theorised.

To summarise: the negotiative processes involved in constructing non-hierarchical organisation within the context of the women's movement have been detailed and discussed in this research. Specifically, these processes make demands on the organising skills of participants. It has been shown that the arenas in which these negotiative processes occur are variable with respect to the particular structural configurations

which pertain at a given time, and that particular difficulties arise in the case of Women's Centres where the need to manage a situation of 'open participation' makes further demands on participants. This study concludes that it is inadequate to characterise the construction and maintenance of non-hierarchical organisation as 'spontaneous'; the processes involved are inherently 'political' and hence negotiated.

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